

Lyric's Constellation, Poetry's Radical Privilege

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You're nothing without a constellation, and you probably need a force-field too . . . Or so it's come to seem, and likewise to seem as if some rhyme or song should by now have imaged a radical aesthetic-critical practice on the verge of falling, or already having fallen, first into formula and then cliché. For these days there's apparently so much constellative activity – so many and such luminous constellations suspended in the night sky – that the concept, practice, and type of construction long associated with the terms *constellation* and *force-field* may truly be getting, with apologies to Kurt Weill and company, Lost in the Stars. To be sure, recent art and criticism are replete with illuminating developments in the theory and practice of constellation perhaps most influentially projected by Frankfurt School figures – Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno especially – and by Modernists adjacent, or with marked affinities, to them.¹ Yet there are signs that many current invocations or applications of the constellation and force-field unconsciously threaten to erase the Frankfurters' signal contributions in this area, renewing longstanding questions about postmodern and, more specifically, Anglo-American reception of German Modernist art, aesthetics, and critical theory. Fundamental to this recent turnabout has been the kind of relationship lately often presumed to obtain between the aesthetic on one hand and the ethical, sociopolitical, or historical on the other. Of course, the need to understand and engage that relationship has always been a leitmotif if not the *raison d'être* of constellation.

It's one thing – potentially, a crucial thing – for poetics and criticism to devote attention to the sociopolitical (or the ethical, historical, and cultural) life of art and aesthetic experience. It's another thing – probably less common, probably more urgent, probably more valuable for some time now – to emphasize that the social and the aesthetic interfuse one another in ways that frustrate claims for predetermined causality or even for causal direction. (It hardly needs saying that the value of this last emphasis has grown in direct proportion to the popularity, in contemporary art and criticism, of self-consciously interventionist contentions for the determining character of the sociopolitical or historical, contentions themselves widely presumed not only to combat isolationist individualism, but also to count as or towards real-world agency and action.) But rarest of all (because most susceptible to the terrifying charge of *bourgeois formalist aestheticism*) is something else still. This something else is the idea that the much-celebrated process of constellation – the process of forming configurations of thought that allow us critically to move towards grasping or conceiving what otherwise would tend to remain unapprehended in the sociopolitical or historical – is a process whose origin and development Benjamin and Adorno, Marx before them, and various artists and critics long afterward, all identify as fundamentally *aesthetic* in impetus, mode, model, dynamic, and overall character. The point is not merely that art and aesthetic experience are productively brought together with the sociohistorical contexts or movements that illuminate them and that they in turn may help us freshly or more powerfully to register and comprehend. It is rather that constellation is itself an irreducibly aesthetic activity, inconceivable without the generative experience of art and imagination and – what amounts to the same thing – incapable of taking place without this aesthetic infrastructure that enables us to begin pushing towards post-aesthetic, conceptual articulation of the not-yet-conceived (a not-yet-conceived by no means always utopian, perhaps not utopian at all in any substantive sense).

It's worth recalling that Benjamin and Adorno initially theorize and develop the constellation and force-field in opposition not to one but two powerful critical tendencies, each of whose tenets and procedures survive remarkably intact today (sometimes, though not always, in different dress and under new banners). The first is more-or-less orthodox historical materialism, with its frequently

mechanistic but sometimes nuanced and, in any case, often formidable pronouncements about how artistic, literary, and cultural phenomena essentially reflect or are determined by the socioeconomic or historical. The second tendency involves versions of formalism that isolate and hypostasize the literary-artistic object to such a degree that larger sociohistorical forces, far from seeming to determine art and aesthetic experience, can at most be felt as background thematics or vaguely present *Zeitgeister*. There's undeniable elegance to this schema of double opposition, for in much of their work Benjamin, Adorno, and their cohort do bob and weave between aesthetic formalism and historically-oriented materialism. Indeed, their shuttling usually creates a fine symmetry-in-motion, as the Frankfurters strive to grasp – and then, rarely missing a beat, in some sense to imbue – the sociohistorical with an attuned perceptive awareness generally associated with aesthetic engagement. That is, they seek to ground such attention in the sociohistorical itself; or it might be better to say that they want such achieved attention returned to or regrounded in the sociohistorical: they wish to put acts of aesthetic perception into dynamic coordination or intense dialogue with what at first seems like sociohistorical ground but which, transformed, can begin to appear as extended or altered sociohistorical horizon. History, society and politics, brought into and charged by aesthetically-stimulated apprehension, are post-aesthetically seen with greater clarity and particularity as the very substance (latent or manifest) of art and aesthetic experience, while aesthetic insight and articulation make it seem possible for us to perceive and identify more, and potentially different or new, sociohistorical content or substance (or, even more radically, to form sociohistorical *materials* into *content* that in some sense had not previously existed).

Yet the suggested in-motion balance between the aesthetic and its presumed other (or the movement towards their never-quite-achieved balance) is in one significant respect more apparent than real: a telling asymmetry – frequently unremarked, glossed over, or simply refused in contemporary criticism – is actually in play. For while the aesthetic and the sociohistorical are to be brought towards and threaded through one another, it is the aesthetic that does the threading, both of itself and its ostensible other. In the older language of the Romantic organicism that marks the modern beginnings of constellation and force-field theory, the aesthetic serves as “vital” principle or principle-activity or theory-practice; it brings consciousness and the presumably external (history, society, reality) together (or, in a less synthesizing and totalizing view, it reintroduces these apparent opposites to one another, puts them into – or into fuller, more intense – dialogue).² And despite Modernism's self-distancing from Romantic organicism and from the self-involvement necessarily occasioned by organicism's formal bi-directionality (organicism's engagement of the external and its simultaneous reflective self-engagement), Modernist aesthetics for its part manifests, albeit in a usually distinct vocabulary, a principle and practice – constructivism – that works in a manner parallel, indeed often identical, to Romantic vitalism, and with essentially the same questions of agency at issue. Though a surprising number of critics, paying far too little or too literal attention to the Modernists' specific language and polemical situation, have missed constructivism's reliance on and translation of organic vitalism, such reliance is everywhere evident (in a list that could begin with Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno, Eliot, Pound, H.D., Joyce, Picasso, Matisse, Eisenstein, Vertov, and Vallejo, and that could be extended almost indefinitely).³

At all events, to speak here of an asymmetry consciously and necessarily weighted towards the aesthetic is really just another way to say *constellation*, which designates the subject's constellative action informed by reflection and undertaken in relative freedom from conceptual determination, and which also designates the constellative object constructed by such action. This is why Benjamin at key moments, and Adorno almost always, can happily sign onto “the critique of constitutive subjectivity” – the critique of the notion that meaningful human subjectivity is essentially preformed to unfold temporally in a virtually automatic, mechanically progressive or to-be-presumed-upon sequence – while they can simultaneously insist that only subjectivity itself can stretch past such already-determined and therefore mechanistic concepts of self and reality, so that the critical purpose becomes,

“with the strength (or *force* or *power*) of the subject,” “to break through the deception of constitutive subjectivity” (“... mit der Kraft des Subjekts den Trug konstitutiver Subjektivität zu durchbrechen”)⁴. As the answer to the problem or dialectic of enlightenment is *more* (more nondeterminist and noninstrumental) enlightenment, so too the answer to the problem of subjectivity is more – more emancipated – subjectivity. The conscious or reflective activity and process that begins to make this possible goes by several names; one is *constellation*.

Underlying the deep affinity or even identity of aesthetic and constellative activity is the special role played by art, aesthetic experience and imagination vis-à-vis conceptual thought. Reflection on this special role reaches back far behind contemporary Left artists and critics, the Frankfurters, and Marx and Engels (however much they all draw consciously on Aristotelian and, in a more modern vein, Viconian, Romantic, and Kantian traditions of poetics and aesthetics). At issue is how art or our aesthetic experience of it imagines – attempts in semblance – the difficult task of bridging otherwise apparently differentiated realms within thought, and then imagines bridging the distance between critical thought and concrete action. Decisive here are the ways that art makes this task (of getting us to stretch, or stretch past, the bounds of extant concepts) inseparable from pleasure, or at least from affective experience of intrigue or of somehow-intriguing arrest. In Modernist constructivism’s translation of the Kantian and Romantic theory-practice of organic form, this concerns (as it did in Romanticism) art’s modes of pushing or gesturing in semblance towards the post-aesthetic construction of new concepts that would seem not only more than instrumental, but also more than arbitrary, and that could appear to achieve potential noninstrumentality and nonarbitrariness (in a word, such potential *objectivity* or *universality*) precisely because aesthetic thought-experience maintains the form – but only the form, and is thus quite exactly only the semblance – of “objective-substantive” conceptuality.

Offering a seeming, apparent, merely formal or semblance-version of substantive-objective conceptuality makes the aesthetic effectively quasicontceptual. Presented to the subject himself or herself as if it were a logical, substantive-objective concept, but actually characterized by a fundamentally affective experience of conceptuality (*feeling* rather than intellectually understanding the concept, so to speak), precisely this aesthetic experience or quasicontceptuality permits and can even propel the eventual expansion of objective conceptuality. For its mere semblance-character, appearance-character, or illusion-character (*Scheincharakter*) is exactly what allows aesthetic thought-experience to avoid determination by extant (and therefore substantive, “objective”) concepts; and the semblance-character of art and aesthetic experience thus underwrites their relative lack of responsibility to – their relative freedom from determination by – extant concepts. This does not mean freedom from the sociohistorical or political; it means freedom from determination by extant governing (or, for that matter, extant oppositional) *concepts* of the sociohistorical or political. (The difference between the two – between sociohistorical/political determination and conceptual determination – has consistently been collapsed in variants of marxian, neomarxian, and postmarxian Left critique. But the difference is what makes Marx possible – what makes a human subject, conditioned by the sociohistorical and subjected to reigning concepts and ideologies, nonetheless capable of thinking through and past existing concepts and ideologies – in the first place.)

Semblance-character’s freedom from substantive conceptual domination permits the aesthetic’s inherently experimental stretching – its stretching past those already known, determined and determining concepts that it is not bound by – to feel not like dutiful work but rather, to a highly significant degree, like play. Since by definition aesthetic thought-experience has only the form, only the semblance, of objective, content-filled conceptuality, aesthetic work with conceptual form literally becomes play-work, the mere form or semblance of conceptually-determined intellectual operations: from the affective get-go, one plays around with, and is free to recombine, stretch, or extend the conceptual materials, in ways not usually sanctioned where an already-determined conceptual content necessarily delimits the acceptable range of results.⁵

This view of art and aesthetic experience as inherently experimental leads us to why lyric poetry in particular will mean so much to constellation theory and practice as developed by the Frankfurters and kindred artists and critics; and the reasons involved are of a piece with what earlier had made lyric so crucial to Marx, Engels, and Kant, among others. The Frankfurters and the artists historically closest to them participate in a tradition of aesthetics and poetics that regards Romantic and modern lyric as literary art's "go-for-broke-game" ("Va-banque-Spiel"), for the lyric must work coherently in and with the medium – language – that human beings use to articulate presumably objective concepts, even while the lyric explores in semblance-character the most subjective, nonconceptual, and ephemeral phenomena. This theoretical or philosophical difficulty, concerning how simultaneously to think objectivity and subjectivity, also arises practically as lyric's great problem of form-construction. How – with language alone as medium – to build a solid, convincing artistic structure out of something as evanescent as subjective song and how, in the bargain, to delineate or objectivate the impressively fluid contents of capitalist modernity? How, spontaneously yet rigorously, and with the utmost concision, to make thought sing and to make song think?

For the Frankfurters, lyric dramatizes with special intensity modern aesthetic quasi-conceptuality's more general attempt in semblance to stretch conceptual thought proper, precisely in the aesthetic's enactment of a thought-experience that maintains the form of conceptual thought without being beholden to extant, status-quo concepts and their contents. Lyric's special formal intensity within this larger field of quasiconceptual aesthetic experience arises from lyric's historically constitutive need to stretch in semblance, via its musicality, the very medium of "objective" conceptual thought, language – to stretch language quasiconceptually, mimetically, all the way toward affect and song but without relinquishing any of the rigor and complexity of conceptual intellection, so that in a semblance-character vital to the possibility of critical agency, speech can appear as song and song can legitimately *seem* to be logical, purposeful speech-act.⁶

All this perhaps merely restates, in the vocabulary and from the matrix of lyric history, the idea that Benjamin's and Adorno's much-celebrated theory and practice of the constellation, far from being an antidote to immersion in the aesthetic and the literary, is for them the most profound work of the aesthetic, the literary, and, above all (because of its medium and that medium's relationship to conceptuality), the poetic in lyric mode. *Pace* orthodox materialist and determinist critics whose influence has always returned in new guises, Benjamin perhaps more than any other commentator grasps how a commitment to formal aesthetic and specifically lyric experience suffuses Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* and the famous Eleventh Thesis in particular, which – far from being an interventionist call for the substantive identification of art, criticism, or theory with a particular concept or program of politics – is rather an insistence on aesthetic autonomy over against the aestheticism that (in what Marx and Engels will reject as Left Young Hegelian German Ideology) believes intellectual or aesthetic activity can be collapsed into, or identified with, substantive political stances and actions.⁷

Not least important to Benjamin, as he and Adorno go on to theorize the constellation and force-field (with one eye reading Marx and one ear overhearing nineteenth- and twentieth-century experimental lyric), will be Marx's own numerous signals, perhaps above all in Thesis Eleven, but also scattered throughout *Das Kapital*, concerning the inestimable importance of the lyric subgenre of epigram and the object or objective reality upon which epigram aims, at least mimetically, in semblance, to inscribe itself. It is from this foundationally formal aesthetic source and lyric goad to critical self-activation (which, again, by definition seeks to exceed determination by extant concepts) that Benjamin and Adorno elaborate the constellation and force-field. Lyric, rather than being determined by the usual logical-conceptual rules concerning conceptuality's own medium of language, constellates its workings of conceptuality's linguistic medium so that, while still manifesting the formal appearance of logical conceptuality, those formal, constellated workings will do something that real, logical, substantive, determined concepts generally do not do: sing.

In lyric's semblance-song, not only particular conceptual determinations, and not even just

conceptual determinations in large numbers, seem to have been both suspended and transcended. Instead, lyric's semblance-song appears to have sung into suspension the very medium of logical, conceptual-objective determination, to have sung language into rich indeterminacy, into a medium or modality where determination appears as something still to be decided, where determination remains an open question subject to the agency of human subjects (as opposed to the case where human beings, subjected to the rule of extant conceptual determination, feel that subjective agency is denied to them). To the degree, then, that lyric's history is inseparable from the affective stretching (via musical semblance) of "objective" conceptuality's linguistic medium, lyric has been accorded a privileged place in constellation theory and practice and, therefore, in Frankfurt critical theory in general. Like the lyric from whose history it in significant part springs, the constellative act provisionally frees itself from the standing rules or determinations of conceptual order, so that it may reconfigure the materials before it. But the resulting attempt to constellate is successful only when – like a successful artwork and (given the importance of the conceptual), especially like a successful lyric poem – the constellative act and the constructed or achieved constellation can seem nonarbitrarily to point toward or begin to instantiate a newly-glimpsed objectivity.

Thus modern lyric from Romanticism through the twentieth century stands, throughout Benjamin's and Adorno's writings, as the initial foundation and ultimate instance of how, over against more orthodox historical materialism, constellative form seeks the kind of thought that by definition attempts to exceed determination by extant concepts while still aiming to configure or construct something potentially objective or universal. To restate the idea: the constellation and its force-field work together as an intellectual attempt nondeterministically, yet also nonarbitrarily, to locate and connect dynamically elements (historical, socioeconomic, cultural) that are not initially given as relational but that, when animated – constellated – into conjunction, create or reveal a signifying force-field that is neither instrumental nor arbitrary. We have to do here with an intellectual, yet to some degree also affective experience meant to pass through critical subjective agency and activity on its way toward a newly constructed objectivity or potential universality. This is, of course, almost precisely Benjamin's sense of what genuinely experimental lyric does. It is likewise and even more explicitly Adorno's oft-quoted definition of such lyric: "a subjectivity that turns into objectivity." We might note in this regard that one of lyric's constitutive gestures – apostrophe – tries always to encapsulate or enact its movement of undetermined but somehow justified, felt-as-necessary articulation of address directed at once to self and other (a subjective and yet objectivating address that works in double-direction by generally projecting the emergence of a formalized *O!*-space for thought, feeling, and engagement).⁸ At any rate, it is hardly accidental that, again and again, Benjamin and Adorno will momentarily suspend their considerations of the substantive referents pertaining to the constellations under construction in order to emphasize the formal aesthetic dynamics of construction and its twinned Other, mimetic semblance-expression. It is almost as if Benjamin and Adorno were, in that very moment of aesthetic engagement and critique, turning to apostrophize the figure or personification named *Constellation*. It cannot be gainsaid that such charged momentary suspension is the very calling card of aesthetic experience, and of lyric especially, whose go-for-broke wager involves reconfiguration of the forms of its linguistic medium.

And from the perspective of lyric theory and practice, such a wager and reconfiguration will mean making the constellation – the heavenly, intelligent, *geistige* (in modern secular-political terms, the "public" or "critical") sphere – sing its music and allow the music of that sphere to be heard. The model or spark is, again, lyric's taking communication-determined conventions of language-use and making them sing their way towards becoming something that has escaped conceptual determination but that nonetheless does not seem arbitrary. In a dance-tension of thought and affect, constellation seeks (with at least a hint of the semblance-character that animates lyric) to restore to thought-experience what the invaluable tool of conceptual abstraction perforce has excised from thought, namely, concrete, particular, conceptually undetermined *experience*.⁹ As is well-known, the modern

“withering of experience” becomes one of Benjamin’s – and, largely through Benjamin’s influence, one of Adorno’s – great themes. It’s a theme inseparable from Baudelaire and the Modernist poetry following him, whose great question is whether lyric experiment and allied artistic-aesthetic endeavors can contribute to the reconstitution or reconstruction of a not-already-conceptually-determined experience (in particular, an experience not already determined by the superconcept known as exchange value).¹⁰

Those strains in Modernist artistic constructivism that reimagine the Romantic artwork’s attempts to discover its own “rule,” “law,” “theory” or “concept” in the artwork’s very process of developing itself (rather than in accordance with an already-at-hand conceptual paradigm) undertake constellation at the aesthetic ground-floor of making and responding to art (and especially, for the reasons discussed above, of making and responding to lyric). Constellation on sociological, political, historical, and cultural levels manifests a kindred activity of configuring materials whose meaning or trajectory does not neatly present itself in an already determined or determinable manner, and therefore requires some degree of imaginative effort that is as intense and, in its own way, as rigorous, as intellectual-conceptual analysis. It’s not happenstance that among the aesthetic, lyric, and sociohistorical problems Benjamin and Adorno love to attend to are those that seem precisely and self-consciously to constellate this very theory of constellation. These may indeed be some of the most fascinating moments in their work, but, arguably and on the Frankfurters’ own authority, the issues will be even more intensely presented by poets attempting implicitly or explicitly to enact and rediscover the bases of constellation theory and practice in the making of and response to lyric art.

I’ll shortly glance at such an instance in later twentieth-century poetry. But it’s worth looking first at a text from the Frankfurt School *oeuvre* in which treatment of the constellation and force-field unfolds with particular acuity and intensity and with profound connections to the issue of lyric. To select only one, two, or several such texts is no small task, for the temptation is strong to begin quoting and seeking to explicate far too many sources, everything from Benjamin’s early study of the German play of mourning, the *Trauerspiel*, all the way to the crackling restatements made throughout Adorno’s unfinished *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970) (where we are told, among many other examples, that: artistic “genius,” rather than being seen from the usual great man/great subject perspective, is instead to be grasped sociohistorically, which will tellingly center in the first place not on sociohistorical concepts and referential materials but rather upon the artwork’s imaginative ability to “hit upon a constellation, subjectively to achieve the objective, (to present) the instant in which the methexis of the artwork in language allows convention to be discarded as accidental”; artistic imagination or fantasy “shifts whatever artworks absorb of the existing into constellations through which they become the other of the existing, if only through its determinate negation,” “the constellation of the existing and the nonexisting is the utopia of art,” and “(u)nconsciously every artwork must ask itself if and how it can exist as utopia: always only through the constellation of its elements . . . taking the unvarying into itself, taking it apart, and putting it back together again . . . reconfigur(ing) the other out of the unvarying”; in terms of genuinely critical art, “(e)very work is a force field” and is indeed “(t)hrough its inner tension . . . defined as a force field even in the moment of its arrested objectivation”; and “an artwork is adequately perceived only as a process. If however the individual work is a force field, a dynamic configuration of its elements (dynamische Konfiguration seiner Momente), this holds no less for art as a whole”).¹¹

A text that commentators have considered with surprising infrequency in terms of constellation theory is Adorno’s “The Essay as Form.”¹² But Adorno’s essay on essay-form turns out to be a major – and in many ways one of the Frankfurt School’s most sustained, yet most compressed – treatments of the constellation and force-field. Adorno worked on “The Essay as Form” from 1954-1958; it is one of the few pieces from the four-volume *Noten zur Literatur* (condensed into the two-volume, 1991-1992 translation *Notes to Literature*) that Adorno had not published or presented as a talk or lecture before its appearance in *Noten zur Literatur*. By at least the middle of the 1954-1958 period (and

perhaps sooner), Adorno had apparently begun making notes for what would be *Ästhetische Theorie*.¹³ Even without knowledge of this background, one is struck by the degree to which "The Essay as Form" reads like a précis, or rather a prefigurative microscopic enactment, of *Aesthetic Theory*. This might seem unexpected, given that "The Essay as Form" hardly announces art or aesthetics or, for that matter, constellation, to be its subject matter. But these are in fact its materials, as Adorno's essay on essay-form identifies the latter with constellative activity itself, and thus indicates that on some level the essay-form possesses a profoundly aesthetic character. To put it somewhat differently, the essay is a, if not *the* crucial form-process through which we come to articulate what *Aesthetic Theory*, as so much of Adorno's work, will be so emphatically "about": the connection between aesthetic experience and critical thought. Hence, among the constituent elements that "The Essay as Form" constellates are: conceptuality; aesthetic semblance and artistic form; critical thought; and, of course, constellation theory itself – along with at least two additional elements. The first, quite dramatically introduced and treated, happens to be Walter Benjamin, and the second, the presence of which likewise haunts, signifies, and is constantly evoked, has a name that remains – barely – unpronounced: lyric poetry.

Adorno begins "The Essay as Form" by delineating, as he sees it (in a position Benjamin, Lukács, and others had previously if only partially adumbrated), essay-form's less-than-legitimate status in German official intellectual (and, especially, academic) culture through at least the late 1950s. Adorno argues that the essay becomes branded as illegitimate because of its relentlessly experimental character, its ability and willingness to begin without an already-determined, overarching conceptual framework (beneath which would logically fit various subordinate categories and the materials mechanically to be slotted into them). Because the essay "does not let its domain be prescribed for it" and shrugs off "the model of a boundless work ethic" (unbegrenzter Arbeitsmoral) in at least partial favor of "luck and play," "it is classified a trivial endeavor." The essay openly, dangerously, invites essayists and readers to make "interpretation" (which must to some degree draw upon a "spontaneity of subjective fantasy" or imagination) inseparable from the logical-conceptual aspects involved in understanding the object to be analyzed. This sort of interpretation is tested by its "compatibility with the text and with itself, and its power to bring the object to speech in the conjunction of its elements." This is why the essay, though it still works primarily with conceptual materials, and though the essayist and reader still maintain a primarily conceptual relationship to essay-form, nonetheless "has something like an aesthetic autonomy" (*EF*, 3-5/10-12).¹⁴

Having on its first page mentioned Benjamin together with Simmel, Lukács, and Kassner, "The Essay as Form" evokes Benjamin's critique of "the continuum of concepts" (a critique most famously instanced in the last piece Benjamin was known to have written before his death, the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" ("Über den Begriff der Geschichte")). "Because the unbroken order of concepts is not equivalent to what exists, the essay does not aim at a closed deductive or inductive structure . . . (It) rebels against . . . that old injustice done to the transitory, whereby it is condemned again in the concept. The essay recoils from the violence in the dogma according to which the result of the process of abstraction, the concept, which, in contrast to the individual it grasps, is temporally invariant, should be granted ontological dignity." The essay thus attempts to reconstruct or re-establish "(t)he relationship to experience," which is actually "the relationship to all of history" (because "(m)erely individual experience, which consciousness takes as its point of departure, since it is what is closest to it, is itself mediated by the overarching experience of historical humankind"). And in one of his first significant hints about the affinity with lyric, Adorno turns to some of the latter's privileged images to take note of various of the essay's means for reconstructing the sense or semblance of experience and historical meaning. Parallel to the artistic techniques used to re-imagine a now-lost sense of nature, the essay's own "alexandrinism is a response to the fact that by their very existence, lilacs and nightingales – where the universal net has permitted them to survive – make us believe that life yet lives" (dass Leben lebte noch) (*EF*, 10, 11/23-24, 26).¹⁵

Moving ever closer to the especially intense ways that lyric songfully stretches the linguistic medium of conceptuality – and thus projects an at least formal stretching of concepts themselves – Adorno observes:

The essay . . . wants to help language in its relation to concepts, to take them in reflection as they have been named unreflectingly in language . . . For it understands that the demand for strict definition has long served to eliminate – through stipulative manipulations of the meanings of concepts – the irritating and dangerous aspects of the things that live in the concepts. But the essay does not make do without general concepts . . . nor does it deal with them arbitrarily. Hence it takes *presentation* more seriously than do modes of proceeding that separate method and object and are indifferent to their objectified contents. (*EF*, 12, italics added/27-28)

Adorno then reveals more of how this can be done, and who or what best models such presentation; at issue is something that does justice to but is still different from conceptual thought: “The manner of expression is to salvage the precision sacrificed when (conceptual) definition is omitted, without betraying the subject matter to the arbitrariness of conceptual meanings decreed once and for all. In this, Benjamin was the unsurpassed master.” How does this mode, of which “Benjamin was the unsurpassed master,” work or point, in its still-undetermined singular “precision,” towards objectivity or universality without relying on the already-determined universals that concepts are meant to represent (not to mention, without falling into an equally mechanical and determinative sheer arbitrariness)? Adorno continues:

This kind of precision . . . cannot remain atomistic. Not less but more than a definitional procedure, the essay presses for the reciprocal interaction of its concepts in the process of intellectual experience. In such experience, concepts do not form a continuum of operations. Thought does not progress in a single direction; instead, the moments are interwoven as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of the texture. The thinker does not actually think but rather makes (himself or herself) into an arena for intellectual experience, without unraveling it. (*EF*, 12-13/28-29)

Thus “The Essay as Form” moves, via its discussion of this aesthetic and now clearly lyric-Benjaminian mode of particularist precision (indebted to the influence of Benjamin the writer, Benjamin the translator and interpreter of Baudelaire, and Benjamin the author himself of a small but fascinating body of poetry¹⁶), towards theorization of the configuration-constellation and the force-field themselves:

This kind of learning remains vulnerable to error, as does the essay as form; it has to pay for its affinity with open intellectual experience with a lack of security that the norm of established thought fears like death . . . All (the essay’s) concepts are to be presented in such a way that they support one another, that each becomes articulated through its configuration with the others. In the essay discrete elements set off against one another come together to form a readable context; the essay erects no scaffolding and no structure. Through their movement the elements crystallize as a configuration. It is a force field, just as under the essay’s gaze every intellectual structure must transform itself into a force field. (*EF*, 13/29-30)

It is through the elements’ *movement* that they crystallize into configuration-constellation (the two terms, which I’ve hyphenated here, are generally synonymous for Adorno and Benjamin). On close inspection, Adorno’s comments are seen to contain a precisely composed ambiguity that suggests overlap between the sense that the movement of the elements occurs of its own accord and the sense that this movement is stimulated into being or even constructed by the subject’s constellative or configurative activity. In a related ambiguity, the constellative act’s achieved result would appear to be the constructed constellation, configuration, or object itself; yet the latter’s seemingly now-static

objectification can nonetheless always be re-revealed as merely the object-face of the process of objectivation (in which the elements' other truth is their processive, dynamic condition). Precisely this oscillation between sheer movement and complete arrest underlies Benjamin's notion – so clearly indebted to his relationship to art and, above all, lyric – of the *image* as the rich site that presents, or allows us reflectively-critically to begin grasping, what Benjamin terms “dialectics at a standstill.” Having already identified Benjamin as the greatest practitioner of the kind of essay it has in mind, “The Essay as Form” plays repeated notes of Benjaminian movement and standstill:

Discontinuity is essential to the essay; its subject matter is always a conflict brought to a standstill. (EF, 16/35)

In comparison with forms in which a preformed content is communicated indifferently, the essay is more dynamic than traditional thought by virtue of the tension between the presentation and the matter presented. But at the same time, as a constructed juxtaposition of elements it is more static. Its affinity with the image lies solely in this, except that the staticness of the essay is one in which the relationships of tension have been brought to a standstill. (EF, 22/47)¹⁷

Benjamin's ideal of an in-motion writing (that would structurally fuse imagination, precision, and formal-stylistic torque) had been developed partly through his impressive engagements with the Baudelairean experimental-lyric tradition in modern poetry. Those engagements led Benjamin to project as constellative form that sort of writing where each image, phrase, line, and sentence strives to point back – formally and substantively – to the constantly moving center from which they had all along radiated. Adorno thus refers not only to referential and conceptual objects, but also to the writer's presentational means of objectivation, when he states that for the essay “all objects are in a certain sense equally close to the center – equally close to the principle that casts its spell over all of them” (EF, 19/41) And just after marking the modern Baudelairean “revolt of literature against nature” that was likewise one of Benjamin's great subjects (EF, 20/42), Adorno goes on to state that the essay's “truth should be sought”

. . . in the essay's mobility, its lack of solidity the demand for which science transferred from property relations to the mind. Those who believe that they have to defend the mind against lack of solidity are its enemies: the mind itself, once emancipated, is mobile. (EF, 20/43)

The reintroduction of mobility and motion leads Adorno toward his essay's final movement (*movement* as motion and *movement* as a section within a musical composition). This final movement returns to the ideas of configuration-constellation, motion, and a free play with – rather than determination by – concepts. What Adorno now adds and emphasizes is *musicality*, which seems like the culmination of his essay's thinking about freedom from determinate concepts (along the lines we earlier saw suggested in the view of lyric musicality as an inherently subjective stretching of “objective” conceptuality's medium, language), but which seems to have informed Adorno's argument all along. Beginning to recapitulate the constellation's play with otherwise determinate conceptuality, Adorno chooses this moment not only to usher in musicality, but also, with this invitation to music, to declare that “the essay's object” is in fact “the new in its newness (das Neue als Neues), not as something that can be translated back into the old existing forms”:

The persuasive element of communication is alienated from its original aim in the essay – just as the function of many musical features changes in autonomous music – and becomes a pure determinant of the presentation itself; it becomes the compelling element in its construction, whose aim is not to copy the object but to reconstitute it from its conceptual *membra disjecta*. The

offensive transitions in rhetoric, in which association, verbal ambiguity, and a relaxation of logical synthesis made it easy for the listener and subjugated him, enfeebled, to the orator's will, are fused in the essay with the truth content. Its transitions repudiate conclusive deductions in favor of cross-connections between elements, something for which discursive logic has no place. (*EF*, 21-22/45-46)

Conceptual materials and content are not so much banished as they are ambiguated, stretched into almost-musical semblance; the essay

uses equivocations not out of sloppiness, nor in ignorance of the scientific ban on them, but to make it clear – something the critique of equivocation, which merely separates meanings, seldom succeeds in doing – that when a word covers different things, they are not completely different; the unity of the word calls to mind a unity, however hidden, in the object itself. This unity, however, should not be mistaken for linguistic affinity . . . Here too the essay approaches the logic of music, that stringent and yet aconceptual art of transition, in order to appropriate for verbal language something it forfeited under the domination of discursive logic – although that logic cannot be set aside but only outwitted within its own forms by dint of incisive subjective expression.

“Transition,” then, is at issue inside and outside the essay, and is to be understood in terms of movement and musicality. Yet the essay “does not stand in simple opposition to discursive procedure. It is not unlogical; it obeys logical criteria insofar as the totality of its propositions must fit together coherently. No mere contradictions may remain unless they are established as belonging to the object itself” (*EF*, 22/46-47).

The more logical, in the sense of “coherent,” the essay proves itself to be, the more conceptual it would seem to become; but this is why Adorno takes pains to distinguish musical from conceptual logic. This special logic emphasizes the coordination of the elements, rather than their subordination beneath an overarching concept:

(T)he essay does not develop its ideas in accordance with discursive logic. It neither makes deductions from a principle nor draws conclusions from coherent individual observations. *It coordinates elements instead of subordinating them, and only the essence of its content, not the manner in which it is presented, is commensurable with logical criteria.* (*EF*, 22, italics added/47)

As with Baudelaire's paradoxical lyric modernity, “the contemporary relevance of the essay is that of anachronism,” because it involves a mode of experience dedicated to the undetermined (but potentially nonarbitrary) particular, a particular unsubordinated to the superdeterminative superconcept of exchange value. The musical stretching that reopens conceptual closure is an attempt, through musical transition, to

use concepts to pry open the aspect of (the essay's) objects that cannot be accommodated by concepts, the aspect that reveals, through the contradictions in which concepts become entangled, that the net of their objectivity is a merely subjective arrangement. (The essay) wants to polarize the opaque element and release the latent forces in it. *Its efforts are directed toward concretizing a content defined in time and space; it constructs a complex of concepts interconnected in the same way it imagines them to be interconnected in the object.* (*EF*, 23, italics added/48)

Constructing a complex of conceptual materials as one imagines the elements to be interconnected in the object: this partakes to some degree of mimetic process, on the particular model of lyric song engaging conceptuality's medium, language. A number of Adorno's related essays, many of them

(including "On Lyric Poetry and Society" ("Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft")) written during the same period as "The Essay as Form" and likewise deeply indebted to Benjamin's work on lyric and Baudelaire, strike some of the same notes intoned in "The Essay as Form."

(T)hese turbulently expressionistic lines occur in the poem 'Nachtigallen,' which is modeled on a folksong: this constellation is the whole of Eichendorff (diese Konstellation ist der ganze Eichendorff); these stage properties are brought to life . . . through the constellation into which they enter. Eichendorff's lyric poetry as a whole wants to arouse the dead . . . The word for which (these) lines (of his), no doubt inspired by Novalis, yearn is no less than language itself. What decides whether the world sings is whether the poet manages to hit the mark, as if that were something already existing in itself. This is the anti-subjectivism of Eichendorff the Romantic.¹⁸

Like his essays focused in whole or part on Eichendorff, Mörike, George, Baudelaire, Heine, Hölderlin, and others, Adorno's essay on essay-form culminates by constellating constellation itself together with a modernized version or evocation of Romantic lyric. In "The Essay as Form," this occurs in the essay's penultimate moment, when Adorno offers several lines from late Nietzsche, most crucially, "For nothing is self-sufficient, neither in us ourselves nor in things: and if our soul has trembled with happiness and sounded like a harpstring (wie eine Saite) just once, all eternity was needed to produce this one event . . ." (*EF*, 23/49). It is, of course, a particularly Romantic image (half-refused in the next paragraph, the essay's last) of the subject figured as a musical instrument being played (with sound, movement, and an abiding feeling of transition all at a standstill, hovering at the point where music, language, and thought meet, and touch somewhere between the extremes of self-assertion and radical self-dissolution). Among earlier moments in the essay that would appear to have prepared us for the passage from Nietzsche was Adorno's highlighting, in a manner typical of him and Benjamin, Romanticism's engendering of modern notions of lyric experiment and constellation, process and particularity:

The Romantic conception of the fragment as a construction that is not complete but rather progresses onward into the infinite through self-reflection champions (an) anti-idealist motive in the midst of Idealism. Even in the manner of its presentation, the essay may not act as though it had deduced its object and there was nothing left to say about it. Its self-relativization is inherent in its form: it has to be constructed as though it could always break off at any point. It thinks in fragments, just as reality is fragmentary, and finds its unity in and through the breaks and not by glossing them over. (*EF*, 16/35)

Elsewhere I've tried to show the ways the Frankfurters both trace and participate in an artistic-critical interchange between Romantic (German, French, and British) and Modernist poetics and aesthetics.¹⁹ Across the last two decades, some significant parallel trends in American poetry and poetics have returned, yet again – in especially intriguing ways – to key aspects of Romanticism and, perhaps not incidentally, to the literary and aesthetic histories that bring Romanticism together with the Frankfurt School. Among the most interesting twists (from within what might now be deemed our late postmodernism) have been the advancing of vigorous claims that Modernism itself is far from superannuated – claims, indeed, for Modernism having every opportunity to outlive postmodernism. It would not be overstating the case to say that a sense of the constellation as having been Romantic in its moment of modern genesis, and Modernist in its essential development, has left postmodernism out of the these linkages – these constellations! – being built from today's renewed interest in artistic and critical constellation themselves, along with today's concomitant revivification of Romanticism and Modernism. It may also be the case that, for all its anti-determinist reputation, constellation has appeared, to a significant number of postmodernists, to be still too committed even to provisional

coordinates, too constrained by triangulation or other poly-sided geometric metaphors that too closely resemble thesis-antithesis-synthesis models familiar from orthodox Marxism and related philosophical matrices.

The American poet Robert Duncan (1919-1988) is of great importance to these discussions, though here I'll have space only to begin sketching issues raised by his *oeuvre*. Duncan's work and his interchanges with other poets limn some of the key consequences that the initially formal issues surrounding constellation, configuration, and composition have for American poetry's ethical and political situation in the second half of the twentieth century. Unlike some fellow experimental American poets whose major work also began after 1945 or 1950, and certainly unlike poets of succeeding generations, Duncan's relationship to the aesthetics of constellation owes virtually nothing to the Frankfurters, and is traceable in a fairly direct way to British Romantic, Victorian, and Modernist poetry, and, on the American side, to related developments that owe much to Whitman, Dickinson, and their lines of influence, and, above all, to Emerson. It should be noted that Duncan himself gives no indication, in his journals, essays, or conversations, of having read Benjamin or Adorno even after the first English translations of some of their work begin to appear in the early 1960s; he was, however, a reader of Herbert Marcuse, who regularly cited, paraphrased, and reflected upon Benjamin's and Adorno's writings about poetry and the other arts. Indeed, in a manner that quite likely did not please Duncan, one of his poems was brought into a well-publicized, fairly amicable but not terribly illuminating dispute between Marcuse and Norman O. Brown, concerning, among other things, the ability of art and aesthetic experience – under Brown's broadly and radically intended umbrella of an all-embracing Gnostic spiritualism – to count as major resistances to commodity society.²⁰

Like a number of the poets and others associated with the experimental arts community of Black Mountain College, but with singular acuity, Duncan saw how much the Modernist experimentation he was so drawn to (Pound's poetry especially) continued in a different vocabulary, grammar, and syntax the aesthetic, philosophical, and political insurgencies begun in Romanticism (despite many of the Modernists' overt anti-Romanticism). A few years ago the poet Michael Palmer – an artist much influenced by Duncan, and personally very close to him – captured “a series of paradoxes that at once reflect and reflect *upon* the antecedent poetics of what (Duncan) called his ‘Modernist masters.’” Palmer noted that as a student he'd found himself “greatly impressed by the exploratory audacity of (Duncan's) work, by the manipulation of complex, resistant harmonies, and by the kinetic idea of what Duncan called “composition by field,” whereby all the elements of the poem are potentially active in the composition as “events” of the poem.”²¹ Duncan partly inherits the practice and theory of “composition by field” via Charles Olson's 1950 essay-manifesto “Projective Verse,” itself a later Modernist (for some, an early postmodernist) fusion of an expanded Poundian poetics, Whiteheadian, modernized-Romantic process-philosophy (though with an avowed Poundian focus on the object rather than the poet-subject), and related notions of poetic resistance to the determinations of conventional forms (along with, presumably, the concepts underlying them).²² In many respects, what Olsonian projection and composition by field aim for is close to, if not identical with, the set of ideas and practices that gather around “constellation.” Yet in ways that would become increasingly important to later poets who, like Palmer, have greatly valued the resources of the lyric tradition and the inestimable contributions Romanticism makes to it, Duncan goes well beyond Olson in terms of what could be brought into, or back into, the mix – what could be coordinated with and, to that degree, conjoined with, the other active elements already mixed in. Here is Palmer again:

As an engaged, twenty-year old student of Modernist principles . . . I was disturbed by Duncan's free use of ornament, of archaic diction and grandiose rhetoric, and by the neoplatonic aura surrounding much of the work. (Such “disturbance” is an intentional function of Duncan's poetics as he challenges assumptions both to the right and to the left.)

Into a consideration of projective verse, he would introduce Mallarmé; at the mention of Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, he might offer Böhme, William Carlos Williams, Edith Sitwell; to Ginsberg's "spontaneous bop prosody" he would counter with the "Law we are given to follow." Thus, even among sympathetic peers (though Ginsberg and Duncan were not often in sympathy), Duncan felt the need to assert the force of heretical opinion, which in turn for him was grounded in the authority of timeless heretical *gnosis*. The poem was to stand as a "grand collage," a constellation of myriad myths and voices from an eternal counter-tradition, as well as of impulses, accidents, and intrusions, disciplined and informed by an attention to the poem's ratios or measures. Into its field, "where sympathies and aversions mingle," closed and open forms, harmonies and disharmonies, the mythic and the mundane, the hieratic and the demotic, were to be equally welcomed. Whence Pound's plaint, during a visit by Duncan to St. Elizabeth's, that Duncan had put back in everything they had labored so long to take out. Duncan's project can be seen in part as an effort to make place once again for the artifice, affect, and lore Modernism had repressed. However, this was achieved not in reaction against Modernism (and certainly not for the sake of *décor*), but as an extension of its exploratory impulse and a reading or revealing of its progressive, Romantic philosophical and aesthetic origins.²³

Palmer touches in several different registers on something about which Duncan is probably clearer and more explicit than any other later-Modernist or postmodern-period American experimental poet: the crucial continuities that obtain between Romanticism and even the most innovative Modernist developments. A deep insight into these continuities leads Duncan to articulate from within poetic activity itself, in a manner rarely if ever matched among his cohort, a formally rigorous yet likewise formally emancipatory theory of aesthetically-enabled agency. Duncan insists on the most relentless Modernist exploration of medium, and on an equally relentless commitment to the advancement of technique, style, and form, while also insisting on the necessity of song and musicality of all sorts (from the mellifluous to the dissonant and beyond), finding in this very conjunction the Modernist reconstruction and survival of Romantic theories of agency that too often seemed to have gone missing in Modernism. Thus Duncan constantly affirms the importance of the Poundian image – that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time – and still finds, in poem after poem (his own and others'), spatial and temporal ports of entry for a subjectivity not already determined by history or, for that matter, by poems claiming to include it. Likewise with Pound's modeling of composition by musical phrase rather than in obeisance to a traditional metric; Duncan makes this principle his own, going on to emphasize the importance of "leading with the vowel tones." Duncan's way in Modernist poetics and the history of poetry, in other words, is made in no small measure via constellation and constellation's stereoscopic focus not only on the integrity of the made object, but also on the subjective experience required for feeling-knowing the undetermined, for bringing it into being.

Duncan characterizes his own concept and practice of poetic composition as a "magpie's nest or a collage, a construct of disparate elements drawn into the play they have excited"; the characterization describes whatever work Duncan may be doing in the moment, including the thought-work of understanding his present relationship to his earlier poetry:

. . . I have come not to resolve or to eliminate any of the old conflicting elements of my work but to imagine them now as contrasts of a field of composition in which I develop an ever-shifting possibility of the poet I am – at once a made up thing and at the same time a depth in which my being is – the poems not ends in themselves but forms arising from the final intention of the whole in which they have their form and in turn giving rise anew to that intention.²⁴

Duncan's language here catches images and syntax from the opening poem of his path-breaking, influential 1960 volume, *The Opening of the Field*, a poem whose first line is its title:

OFTEN I AM PERMITTED TO RETURN
TO A MEADOW

as if it were a scene made-up by the mind,
that is not mine, but is a made place,

that is mine, it is so near to the heart,
an eternal pasture folded in all thought
so that there is a hall therein

that is a made place,...

* * *

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
as if it were a given property of the mind
that certain bounds hold against chaos,

that is a place of first permission,
everlasting omen of what is.²⁵

The jointure and tension here – in the poem and in Duncan's related prose above – display the connections between the made-up and the really-made, the mind and what is or is not the subject's own, his or her "mine." Instantiated is Duncan's own sense of how the rubbing together of a poem's elements, including the crossing or collision of its lines and sounds, is finally what constitutes the form meant to bring everything – unresolved and unreconciled, but fully present – together, in a manner that can make the imagined inseparable from the truly made. In the language of constellation, the previously undetermined comes to seem objectively real, true, as the breath and stress beats give the feel to the line, the line to the syntax, the syntax to the sentence.

Your "Notes on Organic Form" clears a good deal of the way for me. The opening statement seems to be more succinct than any I've tried to make of this fundamental formalism (perhaps because I get wound up in extenuating circumstances). "a method of recognizing what we perceive" – that paragraph is close to home. The whole account of the process of the poem – of your own way in it – is lovely. And when you get to "whether an experience is a linear sequence or a constellation raying out from and into a central focus of axis . . . discoverable only in the work, not before it" I feel like I'm sailing. (Tho my most excited feeling of constellation comes not from centrality but from a complex of origins of force that set all matters into a need for a particular equilibration – not a mandala or wheel but a mobile.)

Duncan writes these words to his fellow poet and beloved friend Denise Levertov in mid-October 1965, shortly after reading what came to be known as perhaps her most important essay, "Some Notes on Organic Form," published the previous month in *Poetry*.²⁶ (The recent (2004) collection of the two poets' correspondence, magisterially edited by Albert Gelpi and Robert J. Bertholf, from which the

above letter is quoted, is a goldmine of materials for gaining insight into mid-late twentieth century American poetics, and not least in terms of understanding constellation and the aesthetics of form vis-à-vis the political and ethical. Readers will recognize – for example, in Duncan's phrase about "a complex of origins of force" – how intensely engaged the Duncan-Levertov *Letters* are with questions of form, practice, and theory.)

Olson's "Projective Verse" had contained a claim bound to produce controversy: "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT. (Or so it got phrased by one, R. Creeley, and it makes absolute sense to me, with this possible corollary, that right form, in any given poem, is the only and exclusively possible extension of content under hand.)" (Olson, 16). Even taking his parenthetical corollary into account, some readers inferred that even the most exciting formal explorations perhaps were, paradoxically and on some ultimate level, functionalist or servile, for perhaps all such formal explorations were doing was trying to catch up to and then to back away from, out of fear of obscuring, what was paramount: content. Levertov herself could seem to affirm such a view; she infuses "Some Notes on Organic Form," which quotes and paraphrases "Projective Verse" at key points, with a good deal of such functionalism, some of it by way of quotations (Emerson, for example) at least partly wrenched from context. Thus she notes: "'Form follows function' (Louis Sullivan)"; elsewhere she writes, "(Emerson says. 'Ask the fact for the form.')" (Levertov, 70, 71, 73). Yet in the same essay, Levertov also holds, in a way that clearly catches Duncan's eye, that whether a poem offers an experience expressed or enacted in (or as) "linear sequence," or on the other hand as "a constellation raying out," can be known only from the poem itself.

But Duncan doesn't really have that much patience with this either/or, both/and dance. While perceptions and experiences are indeed important to him, constellation is really (in yet another term also used by the Frankfurters) what is involved in genuine *composition*, the creation in poetry of living, configured architectonic structure. Meanwhile, Levertov quotes Olson quoting Edward Dahlberg about how "one perception must immediately and directly lead to another perception" (Levertov, 73). Duncan certainly has nothing against intense perception and poetry's ability to stimulate it, but for him this can carry too much freight of the already-existent, the already-determined, to attract him in a sustained way. In fact, at the point where perception is or threatens to become the basis of a poetics, he doesn't mince words, and had already let Levertov know as much (and would continue to do so). Expressing doubts about the adequacy of a poetics of perceptual renewal, Duncan uses "conceptual" not in line with Kantian-Hegelian-Frankfurt usages that distinguish the conceptual from the imaginative, but rather as a synonym for the compositional-configurative-constellative (over against the *merely* perceptive or perceptual):

. . . for me it's not the *perceived verity* (your seed pearls of summer fog . . .).

I am drawn by the conceptual imagination rather than the perceptual imagination. By the correspondences and counterpoints of several levels of composition. The *meaningful* image rather than the, or before the realistic image. We have been reading Yeats' *Mythologies* which are full of . . . details that are ornamental and atmospheric not conceptual or perceptive: particularly I think now of a peacock screen in his *Rosa Alchemica* series that furnishes a luminosity or enriches the strangeness without being at all necessary. How, in a fairy tale or myth only the operative remains. Yet your mist of dewy diamonds is ornamentive not operational, the verification of *morning*? As Yeats' peacock curtain is verification of fin-de-siècle solitude or study: the distinction is only and importantly that the diamonds clearly appeared to you, confronted your will; where the peacock screen was contrived as setting by Yeats' will . . . (Bertholf and Gelpi, 214-215)²⁷

This valuation of "correspondences and counterpoints" (Duncan is very likely thinking, though without knowing Benjamin, of Baudelairean *correspondances* and Baudelaire's poem

“Correspondances”), of the conceptual-configurational-constellative imagination (over against the perceptual imagination’s highlighting of sequences or relays of intense perceptive moments), is of a piece with Duncan’s denunciations of the view of “‘form’ as (merely to be evaluated for) being effective or not – as appearance, a strategy taken by the poet. (As opposed to) an architecture or a structure, a law in making” (Bertholf and Gelpi, 198). At each of these levels or registers, Duncan in effect advocates a dynamically structural polyphony whose internal “correspondences” do not correspond to (do not “represent”) an already existing external referent or content.

A particularly important sentence in Levertov’s “Some Notes on Organic Form” addresses the relationship of form and content with a vocabulary and poetics of transcendence that, for a good while, Levertov and Duncan had thought they shared. The sentence was a striking revision of Olson’s “FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT.” Levertov writes: “Form is never more than a *revelation* of content” (Levertov, 73; italics in original). “*Revelation* of content” must have seemed to Levertov more active or at least more dramatic than “extension of content,” a point she apparently wishes further to emphasize via the italicization that also calls attention in the first place to her revision of the Olson-Creeley formulation. Yet the opposite case – eventually, it will be Duncan’s case – could be made: “Revelation” carries strong connotations of the revelation of something already present but until now hidden, on the model, of course, of religious revelation. In that sense, “revelation,” however dramatic and energizing it sounds, may be less active and agency-oriented than “extension.” For the ostensibly functionalist “extension” may be something rather different: it may well connote, as Olson and Creeley had likely wanted at least partially to suggest, that form actually makes or constructs more content, “extends” content’s scope.

This will indeed turn out consistently to be Duncan’s even more militantly-held position; and it will prove to have, in both Duncan’s and Levertov’s eyes, as they drift apart during the Vietnam war, tremendous consequences for poetry’s ethico-political possibilities. The differences between them, with antecedents that go back to the 1930s (and, in some ways, to Romanticism) will be mirrored across various sectors of Left poetics, aesthetics, and culture from the late 1960s through the 1980s.²⁸ For Duncan, lyric’s most profound work will be to make or construct a truth not already waiting to be revealed. Composition, construction, and constellation all exist to make something literally beyond the possibility of “revelation,” because what is constellated is not a preexisting content already determined and merely waiting to be illuminated. (Standing behind this may be the distinction, most relevantly adumbrated for modern purposes in Romanticism and with particular force in German Romantic philosophical idealism, between *matter* and *content*; part of what constellation does is to work or form matter into content, rather than to take something that could already be called content and, through the power of form, allow it to be beheld.)

This distinction helps to explain Duncan’s hesitation about Levertov’s recourse to revelation, to say nothing of her depiction of Emerson “ask(ing) the fact for the form.” It also explains Duncan’s preference for what he calls “linguistic form,” a terminological usage less concerned with strict recourse to structuralist notions of grammar and syntax (as later found in much Language Poetry, for example) than with the constellative sense of the agency enabled by the linguistically-based artistic making of, and aesthetic response to, artworks in relative freedom from conceptual determination (as Duncan’s own religious vocabulary – though used differently than Levertov’s – makes clear):

“linguistic” form – the artist uses language to make forms, and in this he (is) in a creature/creator relation to a god who is also creature/creator of the whole. Where “organic” poetry refers to personal emotions and impressions – the concourse between organism and his world; the linguistic follows emotions and images that appear in the language itself as a third “world”; true to what is happening in the syntax as another man might be true to what he sees or feels. (Bertholf and Gelpi, 406, 408)

With their friendship on the verge of dissolution during the Vietnam war (amidst disputes catalyzed by disagreements over what role poetry could or could not play in the anti-war struggle), Duncan, with renewed urgency and also with the relentlessness and vehemence often wounding to others, develops his ideas about why poetry could not become the expression of the anti-war (or any other) movement (however much poets and other artists shared Movement sentiments and views and participated in political actions). In so doing, he returns in interesting ways to the old question of form and content, and implies that the conscious artificing of poetic-artistic composition, configuration, or constellation is actually poetry's own version of genuine immediacy. Duncan contends that, paradoxically, formal commitment and charged aesthetic distance is what gives poetry its earned semblance and real feeling of spontaneity, its impulse towards the making and expression of, and interaction with, an otherwise unavailable or scarcely-existing content.

(O)ur initial breakthrough was not to be concerned with form as conservative or as revolutionary, but with form as the direct vehicle and medium of content. Which means and still means for me that we do not say something by means of the poem but the poem is itself the immediacy of saying – it has its own meaning. And in that is as immediate as the dream. (Bertholf and Gelpi, 668)

The further development of Duncan's and Levertov's poetics, and the unraveling of their friendship in the face of social upheaval, is a subject too large to treat in the remaining space of this essay.²⁹ So I want to conclude by stepping back from the Vietnam years, though the material I'll present in closing will begin to identify, in the formal differences of the two poets' artistic and aesthetic-critical approaches to constellation and lyric, the sources of a painful distance between Duncan and Levertov that will become an uncrossable gulf just a few years later. To take up what Duncan takes up from lines of Levertov's poem "Claritas," the distance will first seem "the *shadow of a difference*/falling between/note and note," but its measure will grow. Though they don't automatically interpret themselves, these materials do possess the somewhat rare character, when presented in tandem, of making extensive commentary potentially redundant or superfluous; consequently, my interpretive analysis in what follows will be minimal.

It is August 1962, and Duncan – as usual, with his life-partner, the painter and visual artist Jess Collins, terribly short on money – has just read Levertov's poem "Claritas" (which two years later would be published in her volume *O Taste and See*), along with other work that she has sent him.³⁰ Here is Levertov's "Claritas":

i

The All-Day Bird, the artist,
whitethroated sparrow,
striving
in hope and
good faith to make his notes
ever more precise, closer
to what he knows.

ii

There is the proposition
and the development.
The way
one grows from the other.

The All-Day Bird
ponders.

iii

May the first note
be round enough
and those that follow
fine, fine as
sweetgrass,
 prays
the All-Day Bird.

iv

Fine
as the tail of a lizard,
as a leaf of
chives—
the *shadow of a difference*
falling between
note and note,
a *hair's breadth*
defining them.

v

The dew is on the vineleaves.
My tree
is lit with the
break of day.

vi

Sun
Light.
 Light
light light light.³¹

How does Duncan respond, reading a poem where, with no small degree of grace and marshalled tension, perception follows perception, both in terms of the sequencing of perceptual contents and in terms of the movement of phrases and sentences through and against the line? Where thought-images, visualized images, and perhaps above all (given that birdsong is the poem's form and content), *sound-images* (of birdsong) are beheld in "proposition and . . . development," to "gro(w)"; and where the poem becomes "ever more precise" by culminating in the *ur-visual* image whose full power would be so overwhelming that it literally could not be looked at, but only visually imagined or acoustically heard (and is heard here as echo-trill of lyric's *ur-sound-image*, birdsong: "Sun/Light./ Light/light light light")?

In fact, Duncan's complex response is mostly energetic and generous, though a contrary undertow

can be felt too. He immediately writes to Levertov:

(Y)our "Claritas" – it's a bird-song – comes to illustrate that our extremest shore may be the shadow of a difference. This morning I sit over coffee and a cigarette. A crew of young men is tearing up the street to install new sewage pipes, so the light-song of your All-Day Bird comes thru the drill . . . but there! There's an other persistent chirrup! Reading these poems over when they arrived, I must have prepared this hour when they burst thru a period overcast – I've been at odds with myself – Your letter came in a delivery with a letter from Bob (Creeley) and another from Cid (Corman), recalling me from the glooms of trying to find a a job – (but I think even this trying to find a job has been, is, a disposition to dwell upon whatever difficulties) to possibilities of freedom. And the poems take on or enter in to speak for my own inner need, to break a way thru . . . But today "the dark they can't help" speaks too of the dark I've let the least unsureness about money be (with a flood of anger that there should be such days at all of not being able to afford whatever) – yet just this unsureness has often been and seems to me in the fondness of this morning most free. This too is "the bush we call/alder"

There *is* a birdsong at the root of poetry – for, needing these poems as I have, new things sparkle in their aftermath and I can feel an answering urgency for song, it presses upward and outward – sets me swinging on the morning as if it were a full branch to be translated into music. (Bertholf and Gelpi, 363)³²

Duncan then composes, in the remainder of this long letter to Levertov, two draft versions (with only minor differences between them) of his poem "Answering," whose crux and turn involve a latter-day version of Coleridgean "joy" (not happiness so much as the ability to feel, to experience an intense response and a sense of capacity for agency and life).³³ Here, with only minor changes from the two draft-versions composed in the letter to Levertov, is a third version of the poem, one that will be published two years later in Duncan's *Roots and Branches*³⁴:

ANSWERING

(after CLARITAS by Denise Levertov)

A burst
of confidence. Confiding

a treasured thing

kept inside,
as if it were a burden,

worrying about money
or were pride
and ambition struggling –

sings out.

It was a song I did not sing.

*

The men are working in the street.
The sound

of pick and pneumatic drill

punctuates
the chirrup a bird makes

a natural will
who works the tossing dandelion head

– a sheaf of poems.

They are employed
at making up a joyous

possibility.

They are making a living
Where I take my life.

*

With no more earnest skill
than this working song

sings
– as if the heart's full

responsibility
were in the rise of words

as momentarily
that bird's notes he concentrates

above the swaying bough,
the fluttering wings.

*

For joy
breaks thru

insensible to our human want.
Were we birds too

upon some blowing crown of seeds
it would be so,

we'd sing as we do.

The song's a work of the natural will.

The song's a work of the natural will.

It scarcely needs remarking that Duncan's "Answering" answers Levertov's birdsong with more birdsong, but wants to do so in a manner that more than matches "Claritas"'s almost purely solo, though perhaps implicitly duet or doubled, voicing. "Answering" is already something like a string quartet on the way towards orchestral transcription. It's hardly accidental that "Answering"'s threaded-through or speaker's voice seems to come from some impossible location of style and diction. While there's a strong feeling of now-archaic Romanticism, it's a weirdly after-Modernism Romanticism that sounds nothing like mid-to-late twentieth century, anti-Modernist neoromanticism. Rather, it folds into itself chronologically Modernist materials (most obviously, the pick and pneumatic drill) and distilled, taut phrasing (with debts to Williams but also to a Romantic and postromantic manner of working with irregular rhyme) as part of the poem's central poesis of both the conflict, and the possibly dynamic interaction, between creative-animating and mechanical-deadening labor. In the first draft of the poem written into the letter, Duncan had included the following stanza, with an explanation to Levertov of his dissatisfaction with the stanza (and, to a certain degree, with other aspects of the draft):

(5)

I could not sleep, for money weighd upon my mind.
I was like a tree with broken limbs.

I had no confidence to meet my need,
I earned no living to ease the importunity I was in.

In my work most out of work I lay awake
thinking with dread of being a typist-clerk

where millions of my fellows daily go
in thought sought my place in the impatient mill
in the works, where

Duncan breaks off the stanza here, and says to Levertov concerning the to-be-discarded fifth stanza:

There's no heart in this kind of thing (5) – I would let the "Answering" song end with evoking the natural will. (5) cultivates, even if protestingly, its own wrong – and the lingering complaint begins to be untrue somehow (If I knew *how* and could render it true in tone . . .)

love

Robert

Duncan then offers a notable commentary on the poem, its raw materials, and his struggle to transform them successfully into poetic form. It's a nice question whether his resort, in the passages below, to language about "form . . . releas(ing) a content," undoes his usual protestations about such formulae, or whether it simply shows him using such language as shorthand for the constellative theory and practice he's otherwise generally keen to distinguish from anything that might hint at form merely outlining or unveiling an already-existing content. Of even more interest may be Duncan's treatment

of his own wage-labor as a clerk-typist, his experience of a stark difference and also some complex interactions between creative-meaningful and for-survival work (the various connotations of “making a living” and “taking my life”), and his sense that it is Wordsworth who hums the undersong of “Answering”’s complexly, anachronistically Romantic revivification of modern socioeconomic problems and Modernist-with-a-difference poetics.

What I am untrue to here is that, while I am angry at having to go to work (and “having” here is just relative to securing, making sure, our living), I also *hope* to find a job, as if there is to be some happiness in it too.

Here's the poem given more exacting line. [Duncan then writes out a second draft-version of “Answering.”]

It seems to (sic) clumsy to *explain* as part the song that it answers your “Claritas.” “Our” reader will discover that for his/her self, or maybe but hear the relation without laboring it in consciousness.

“Answering” has released in a form that rings true a content that, unwilling to release, I had bound myself in. In the immediate crisis (just that at the beginning of the month again we didn’t know where or how we would be able to meet the cost of daily living – we go from week to week, with that trust fund providing rent and gas and lights with ten dollars to spare) “job” and “work” were pitted one against the other. Yet I see I would be happy with a job if it were also meaningful work – in some activity like public health or education or manufacture that is for the communal good. What I dreaded was the slavery of useless typing that can go on (like making commodities that have no purposive good). In the poem “making a living” sings out there for me with its full meaning restored, and restores in my heart some of its natural will. (Is “natural will” a term of Wordsworth?) I’ve been reading him again in these last months with a sympathy that is an excitement too, as if he might wake me from habit. Here’s a bit in the “Prelude” that rang out:

Not seldom from the uproar I retired
into a silent bay, or sportively
glanced sideways, leaving the tumultuous thing,
to cut across the image of a star
that gleamed upon the ice . . . (Bertholf and Gelpi, 363-367)

The very protestations within “Answering,” that something external (the literal birdsong, the workers’ sounds, Levertov’s birdsong poem above all) must break through a modern-mechanical dullness and depression of self that has no small source in the socioeconomic, are not so much belied as powerfully accompanied by a rhythm, a lineation, and an overall sculpting in sound-movement that causes one to pause before pretending that the critic’s commentary can really add much to Duncan’s poem-answer to “Claritas.” Yet it might be observed in closing that the closing of “Answering” – the poem’s singing, doubled assertion that its song is a song of the natural will – has something not just wonderful but also strange about it. That “natural” will has many sources, even within Wordsworth himself. But whether in Wordsworth or, for example, Blake, Romantic plottings of mutually-sustaining relationships between nature and a desire-spurred human consciousness almost always owe part of their force, ironically enough, to their being rendered (or sneakily seeming as if they should have been rendered) in the conditional, subjunctive, or even imperative, and with an appropriately gauged, compressed energy of concern or anxiety about thought or behavior that, being “natural,” would presumably come easily and without effort or artifice.

Back of Duncan's lines here is probably Wordsworth's "The Child is father of the Man;/And I could wish my days to be/Bound each to each by natural piety." (The famous doubling in Wordsworth is that the lines – the final three of "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" – are doubled or repeated when the poet decides to use his own lines as epigraph to the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.") The point, at any rate, is that one's days are not necessarily so bound to each other, nor to or by a piety that stems from, or returns to, nature. Or, if one's days (and nature and piety) are so bound – or if something far more congenial to many twenty-first century liberal and Left ears is substituted for "natural piety," say, transformative agency vis-à-vis the social – the rub is that that natural or social is made in part from, or in a bi-directional feedback loop that includes, the conditional and its desire-energized acts of thought and agency.

In the coming years Duncan will hardly be so mild toward, or so seemingly open to, the ostensible contiguity – over against his preferred conceptual-configurational-constellative imagination – of even the impressively tensile cadenzas of direct perception and synaesthetically-translated perceptions dramatized in "Claritas" (to which he responded in very different form, almost another language, in "Answering"). The difference, which will become much more than the "shadow of a difference," will involve a number of factors, not least, an almost uncontrollable relentlessness on Duncan's part about what he often saw as simply being the necessary defense of poetry against determinist notions that would lessen poetry's unique power. But among those tangled differences really is the fundamental question of constellation over against perception and revelation; and it will help to register the already-active friction, amidst the genuine and profound fellow-feeling between "Answering" and "Claritas," between Duncan and Levertov, if we return one last time to Adorno's "The Essay as Form." For one senses the arch applicability of Adorno's analysis to some of Duncan's at least implicit judgments of "Claritas," of the applicability of Adorno's analysis to Duncan's judgment of perceptual poetics, of a poetics that clearly desires an intense perceptualism to issue in an achieved clarity about what had allegedly existed but not yet been apprehended. Adorno writes of essay-form, but for "essay" we could substitute "constellation" or "lyric": "The essay gently challenges the ideal of *clara et distincta perceptio* and absolute certainty" (*EF*, 14/30).

Notes

For their responses to earlier versions of this essay, I am indebted to Karyn Ball, Norma Cole, Howard Eiland, Robert Hullot-Kentor, Thomas Pfau, Art Strum, and Alex Woloch.

¹ For some invaluable, intentionally signifying instances, see Martin Jay's long-running "Force Fields" column in the journal *Salmagundi*, as well as Jay's *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); see too the many thought-provoking pieces published in the journal whose title is, simply and appropriately enough, *Constellations*.

² For an acute treatment of organic and later nineteenth-century vitalism and its consequences – especially for ideology and, perhaps more significantly, for claims made for the sources and status of ideology-critique – see Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), particularly Chapter Six, "The Novel and Other Discourses of Suspended Disbelief," 163-210. It remains an open question whether the experiencing of the vitalism at issue might have – without making any substantive claims for its "critical" or "subversive" status – a sheerly formal role to play in making agency possible at all.

³ For a literary, aesthetic, and critical-theory history of some key nodal points in Modernist constructivism's return to and rearticulation of Romantic-organic vitalism and its poetics, see Robert Kaufman, "Aura, Still," *October* 99 (Winter 2002): 45-80, reprinted in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Continuum, 2005): 121-147.

⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (1966; New York: Continuum, 1973), xx (translation emended); Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 10.

⁵ For a more extensive account, and for discussion of the primary philosophical and literary materials as well as the critical commentary and reception-history involved, see Kaufman, "Red Kant, or The Persistence of the Third Critique in Adorno and Jameson," *Critical Inquiry* 26. 4 (Summer 2000): 682-724.

⁶ See, for example, Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and, especially, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. and introduced by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969): 217-251 and 155-200; "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" in Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1973): 9-106; "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," "Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire," and "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire" in *Gesammelte Schriften*, prepared with the cooperation of Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972-1999) (7 vols. in 14 individual vols., plus 3 Supplement vols.), vol. 1. 2: 431-654; most of these texts are likewise found in Benjamin, *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1961); see also Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus. Zwei Fragmente.*, ed. and with an Afterword by Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969).

And see Theodor Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society" in Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991-1992), 1: 37-54, and *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. trans. and with a translator's introduction by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), passim; "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft," *Noten zur Literatur*, ed. Tiedemann, 4 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1958-1974), 1: 73-104, and *Ästhetische Theorie*, vol. 7 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), passim. See too Adorno, Benjamin, *Briefwechsel 1928-1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 138 ff., 364 ff., and 388 ff.; in English, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940*, ed. Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 104 ff., 280 ff., and 298 ff.

⁷ For extended discussion of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* in relation to lyric, aesthetic semblance, and critical theory, see Kaufman, "Marx Against Theory (Much Ado About Nothing – and Poetry)" (forthcoming).

⁸ "On Lyric Poetry and Society," 43; "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft," 85. For further consideration, see Kaufman, "Adorno's Social Lyric, and Literary Criticism Today: Poetics, Aesthetics, Modernity" in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 354-375, and "Lyric's Expression: Musicality, Conceptuality, Critical Agency," *Cultural Critique* 60 (Spring 2005). And see "Apostrophe" in Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, augmented ed., with a new preface by the author (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University

Press, 2002).

⁹ See *Negative Dialectics*, 162-166; *Negative Dialektik*, 164-168.

¹⁰ For an invaluable treatment of the question of experience – containing both a long-historical view of its status in Western intellectual and cultural history, as well as discrete, extended analyses of how experience figures in (among other bodies of work) Kantian and Frankfurt critical theory – see Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005). For specific treatment of Frankfurt theory and Modernist lyric vis-à-vis experience, history, and human suffering, see Kaufman, "Lyric's Expression".

¹¹ *Aesthetic Theory*, 171, 173, 233, 312, 206, 292, 301; *Ästhetische Theorie*, 256, 259, 347, 462, 307, 434, 446.

¹² Adorno, "The Essay as Form" in *Notes to Literature* vol. 1: 3-23; "Der Essay als Form" in *Noten zur Literatur*, vol. 1: 9-49. Hereafter, references to this essay will appear as *EF* in the main body of the essay; page numbers to the English translation will be given first, followed by page numbers to the German original.

¹³ Rolf Tiedemann, "Editorial Remarks from the German Edition," *Notes to Literature* vol. 1: xiii; Tiedemann and Gretel Adorno, "Editors' Afterword," *Aesthetic Theory*, 362; Tiedemann and Gretel Adorno, "Editorisches Nachwort," *Ästhetische Theorie*, 538.

¹⁴ Some translations have been emended.

¹⁵ Translation of some lines has been emended.

¹⁶ See Benjamin, *Sonette* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), ed. Rolf Tiedemann.

¹⁷ Earlier, Adorno had similarly stated that the essay's "(c)onsciousness of the non-identity of (its)presentation and subject matter forces presentation to unremitting efforts. In this alone the essay resembles art"; "The Essay as Form," 18; "Der Essay als Form," 38.

¹⁸ "In Memory of Eichendorff," *Notes to Literature* vol. 1, 64 (translation emended), 66-67; "Zum Gedächtnis Eichendorffs," *Noten zur Literatur* vol. 1, 120, 124-125.

¹⁹ See e.g., Kaufman, "Red Kant," "Aura, Still," "Negatively Capable Dialectics: Keats, Vendler, Adorno, and the Theory of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* 27. 2 (Winter 2001): 354-384, and "Sociopolitical (i.e., *Romantic*) Difficulty in Modern Poetry and Aesthetics" (*Romantic Circles Praxis*' special issue on Romanticism and Contemporary Poetics (June 2003); <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/poetics/kaufman/kaufman.html>)

²⁰ See Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 245.

²¹ Michael Palmer, "On Robert Duncan," originally published in the journal of the Academy of American Poets, *American Poet* 5 (Spring 1997), and since republished by the Academy under the title "Robert Duncan and Romantic Synthesis" at

<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15949.html> (italics in original).

²² Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," *Poetry New York* 3 (1950); reprinted in Charles Olson, *Selected Writings*, edited and with an introduction by Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), 15-26.

²³ Palmer, "On Robert Duncan"; Palmer, "Robert Duncan and Romantic Synthesis."

²⁴ Robert Duncan, "Introduction," *The Years as Catches: First poems (1939-1946)* (1966) (Berkeley: Oyez Press, 1977), ii, x.

²⁵ Robert Duncan, "Often I Am Permitted To Return To A Meadow" in *The Opening of the Field* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 7.

²⁶ *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, eds. Robert J. Berthoff and Albert Gelpi, introduced by Gelpi (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 510. Levertov's "Some Notes on Organic Form" first appeared in *Poetry* 106 (September 1965): 420-25, and has been reprinted in, among other places, Denise Levertov, *The Poet in the World* (New York: New Directions, 1973) and Denise Levertov, *New and Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1992), 67-73. The following citations are taken from *New and Selected Essays* (1992).

²⁷ Italics in original.

²⁸ For a sketch of how certain aspects of this formal-political issue extend from Romanticism through Modernism, see Kaufman, "Negatively Capable Dialectics: Keats, Vendler, Adorno, and the Theory of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* 27. 2 (Winter 2001): 354-384, especially 377-384.

²⁹ For further discussion, see Kaufman, "Poetry's Ethics? Theodor Adorno and Robert Duncan on Aesthetic Illusion and Sociopolitical Delusion" (forthcoming in *New German Critique*).

³⁰ *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, 363; Levertov, *O Taste and See* (New York: New Directions, 1964).

³¹ Levertov, *Selected Poems*, preface by Robert Creeley, ed. and with an introduction by Paul A. Lacey (New York: New Directions, 2002), 31-32.

³² Italics in original.

³³ For a brilliant account of Coleridgean (indeed, of *Coleridge's*) coming-to-life in poetic activity, an account, that is, of Coleridgean joy, see Susan Stewart, "What Praise Poems are For," *PMLA* 120. 1 (2005): 235-245.

³⁴ Robert Duncan, "Answering," in *Roots and Branches* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 124-126.