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## Negative Capability

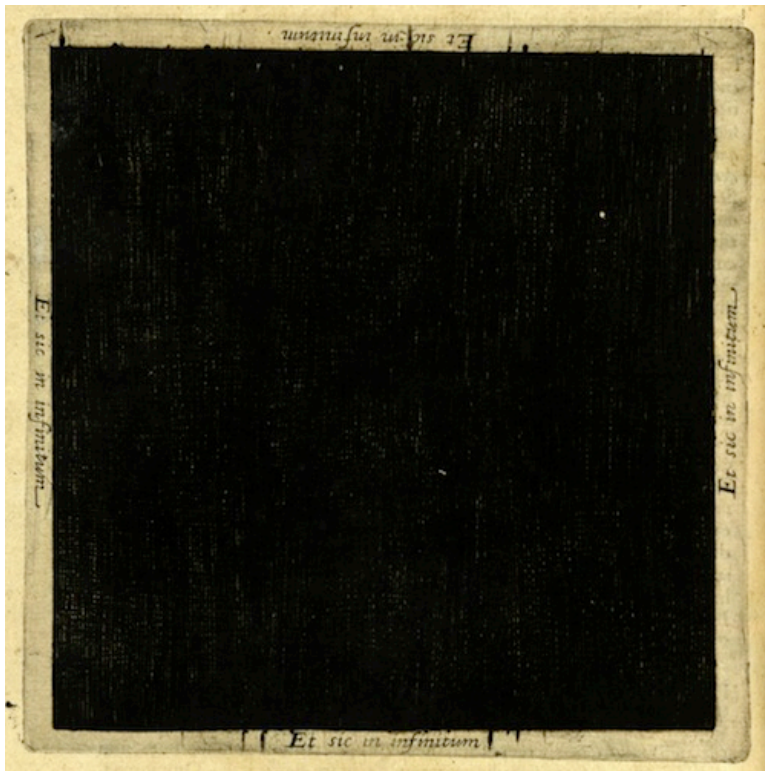
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*...Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. — John Keats*

Keats offers an image of the artist/poet working in a state of creative uncertainty, receptivity, and contradiction, “the doubt of one who would rather walk in mystery than in false lights...and who prefers the broken fragments of truth to the imposing completeness of a delusion,” commented Irish poet Aubrey Thomas de Vere. Keats distinguishes these qualities of his ideal from the preconception, presupposition and predetermination of those who think categorically and theoretically.

Art schools can be veritable academies of irritable reaching. In my graduate school the *only* sin was uncertainty. If you didn't know exactly what you were doing at all times or couldn't adequately articulate it, you were beyond hope and beneath notice. I'm not sure what a school dedicated to “negative capability” might look like, but I expect it would encourage awareness, independence, experimentation, flexibility and openness to the world, and the ability to live with ambiguity, to tolerate failure, and to wait a little while before you make up your mind.

This may be an uneasy state for a student to be in. But we have to be wary of creating false necessities in the meantime. Hurrying students to answers that are not genuinely their own isn't doing them a service.



Et Sic In Infinitum Utriusque Cosmi, Maioris scilicet et Minoris, metaphysica, physica, atque technica Historia, representing the Prima Materia of the Universe. (1617-1621), Robert Fludd

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