

**In Defence of Subjectivity; Joan of Art  
and the Conceptual Turn**

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**Signed Declaration:**

I hereby certify that the work contained in my thesis is my own,

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between Adorno's 'shudder' and conceptual art, in the interest of conceiving of an art form resistant to societal and ontological 'objectification', as embodied by scientific pursuit, capitalist endeavour, and recent philosophical innovation (particularly in the work of Ray Brassier's *Nihil Unbound*, and Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*). This art form, it will be argued, must necessarily be completely conceptual, devoid of any object which might become sundered to these objectifying forces. Just such a form, might be appealed to in order that the subject can feign an escape from absolute objectivity at the hands of the nihilising influence of science. Can the concept of freedom as an artistic declaration help the human to evade reification, in a way that can co-exist with accepted scientific findings; namely the clear base materiality of the 'subject', and the finitude of subjectivity, as signalled by Brassier and the absolute contingency of Quentin Meillassoux?

Examining the implications of Duchamp's 'anything can be art' admixed with Beuys' 'We are all artists,' the study draws, in its latter third, on examinations of Adorno's 'shudder' made in the first chapter, in order to conceive of a means by which the subject may overturn its objectification via the declaration of its own subjectivity even in face of the falsity of this premise. Where, for Adorno, the 'shudder' is felt in face of the artwork, as the subject realises its base objectivity (as a result of the 'truth' which the artwork, as perpetual deceiver in an untrue world, imparts), this study calls for the shudder, which frees the subject from objectivity, to be auto-designated by the subject, upon itself, for lack of an artwork capable of otherwise invoking it in a thoroughly reified world.

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## Introduction

This study accepts as a first principle that Kant's Copernican turn, aimed at mitigating against speculation upon the nature of objectivity - such that would give the philosophical subject a hegemony over the perceivable nature of being - has failed in its purpose. The responsibility which Kant gave to thought to demonstrate the nature of truth strictly from the purview of what can be known to thought, has - as Ray Brassier, Quentin Meillassoux and Graham Harman argue - given thought a privileged position, such that many Post Kantian thinkers appear to draw an irrevocable 'correlation' between objectivity and subjectivity.

Yet, equally, a risk is perceived in the hypothesis that people are mere matter and that the human subject is just one object amongst others, a truth which is expressed both explicitly and implicitly in the works of the above mentioned 'Scientistic Philosophers'; i.e. philosophers who aim to instill a scientific objectivity into philosophical discourse.

Though so long as philosophy aims towards truth there can be no rejection of the scientific turn against the predominance of the subject in philosophy. In this sense, if there is to be any rescue of the subject, it will have to both honour and run contrary to philosophy's obligation to truth, embracing fully the truth of the subject's objectivity so that it could not be refuted out of hand by the Scientific Philosopher, yet leaving open a potential subjectivity of a different order. Life and death, subjectivity and objectivity, freedom and unfreedom (as the socio-political correlate of 'subject' and 'object'), will have to co-exist, but always in the negative register, for to conceive of the possibility of life's living in its opposite register, or freedom emerging in kernel form out of its impossibility, is to conceive of a freedom and subjectivity possible in spite of and not for want of specific conditions. In light of this, this study chooses to argue to the extremes, presenting a hyperbolic extrapolation of the notion of an entirely objective realm of

existence, which cannot be known to the subject. As a consequence, the radical nihilism of Ray Brassier, as expressed in his 2007 text 'Nihil Unbound' is approached in Chapter One with the intention of taking its message to its *nth* degree. Brassier highlights the human mind's base materiality and the proven existence of material matter prior to the advent of cellular existence - as evidenced by the 'Arche Fossil', which registers traces of archaic phenomena - as a counter to the correlationist's characterisation of subjectivity as a pivotal aspect of existence as such. Rather than then merely countering Brassier here by saying that the subject is still necessary so that such phenomena - the fact of its own base objectivity, for instance - be registered, the utter nihilism suggested by Brassier is engaged with and even exaggerated, such that the subject which appears to exist is argued to be a mere facet of nullity (this being the only way that an utter nihilism can logically countenance the apparent existence of the subject). From this purview it will be seen that it is then very difficult to restore the subject in a convincing way. Though this tactical approach aims at finally construing of a subjectivity which can resist even the most forbidding of environments and arguments.

It is to this end that the Adornian 'shudder' is addressed in Chapter Two. The shudder, for Adorno, represents the point at which the subject realises its linkedness with the object, which is normally hidden from it by the mechanisms of rationality which in seeking to temper the threat of nature, aim to subsume all objective phenomena under subjective predicates. Adorno argues that it is only in front of the radically new - or 'modern', artwork - that the subject, being unable to identify the work under subjective predicates (due to its through going novelty) momentarily loses its subjective grounding, becoming lost in the object. This process is fleeting, closing in on itself to leave the subject aware that whilst it is objective in complexion, it is unique in being aware of its objectivity and is, for Adorno, akin to primitive man's shuddering in the face of

primordial nature, prior to the advent of magic ritual which was a precursor to myth, religion and rationality.<sup>1</sup>

On Adorno, it is almost an understatement to say that he is a tricky philosopher to approach. Aside from his perceived complexity - which, incidentally, is exaggerated and surely comes in part from the fact that *Aesthetic Theory* is both incomplete and mostly read in translation, making it appear labyrinthine to the initiate, until it is read with any application, upon which it yields with unexpected ease - Adorno is deeply maligned for both credible and very poor reasons. In this sense, the question 'Why Adorno?' cannot be avoided.

The answer should become fairly evident in the approach of the study. For, far from trying to tackle the apparent twin impasse presented to subjective freedom by capital and rationality by arguing for some flimsily based revolutionary potential within the artwork, despair at the impossibility of surpassing this impasse has been fully engaged with. This is the principle sense in which this study can be said to be at points 'Adornian' (although the eventual employment of 'shudder' in Chapter Three is far removed from Adorno's initial conception of shudder as laid out in Chapter Two). That is to say, all enquiries, for reasons that will be made clear as the study progresses, start firmly in the negative register, in the interest that any perceived redemption from the domination of the subject by first or second nature is not seen as over wishful or 'utopian'. This study presents,

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<sup>1</sup>Whilst the shudder will be examined in depth in Chapter Two, the reader is asked to bear this definition in mind where the shudder is referenced prior to that in Chapter One. The shudder is useful for this study principally in that it allows for the subject to exist as aware of its objectivity, as it 'shudders' in the face of the artwork, which as a deception resists rationalisation, and can therefore ostensibly stand outside the totalising realm of societal objectification and of scientific reductionism. In the course of examining the shudder a further study within this study has been opened up, which appears here as an Excursus, but which impacts on the entire text. Principally this Excursus – appearing between Chapters One and Two - points to a misinterpretation within Adorno scholarship in the Anglo-speaking world, due to mistranslations of the terms '*Schauer*' and '*Schrecken*', principally in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (in both John Cumming's and Edward Jephcott's versions). It is hoped that the reader will pay heed to this Excursus, which whilst presenting a diversion, reinstates the shudder as a central operative term within the Dialectic of Enlightenment and Adorno's wider canon.



effectively, a negative dialectics with no hope of rescue for the subject. Or rather, hope exists, but only for the lack of a genuine possibility of political or ontological salvation, for salvation eliminates the need for hope. In this sense, Adorno is utilised not as the overly romantic wishful thinker who irks with many leftists and with realists/materialists (Ray Brassier amongst them) alike. *That* particular Adorno does not arguably exist in reality anyhow, as will be demonstrated. Rather, Adorno is utilised for his refusal both in the written form and in praxis to become light headed at the notion of revolutionary promise, where that promise arguably fails perennially, as the onward trajectory towards evermore domination of ever more people by the few (or, ever fewer) continues unhampered. Adorno's refusal to become involved with the German student uprising of 1969, far from being a detached and calculated attempt at self-preservation, or a bourgeois evasion of violence, was in fact an extension of his political and philosophical conviction, that domination of nature by man, and, indeed, of man by man, was intrinsic to the both the social 'Universal' and the 'Particular' components of that Universal. Such a negativity is employed here in, in order to tactically conceive of a space for subjectivity.

It is to this end that the hypothesis that, via Art, subjectivity might be feigned - for lack of a political alternative - has been employed in Chapter Three, which otherwise remains unconcerned with the directly political, except in that a correlate is seen between the existence of the subject *per se*, and the existence of the political subject. For if the subject is not rescued *per se* there can be no 'political' subject to speak of. For what use is a political subject that is null and objective from the offset? It is in this respect that this study is tactical in arguing to the extremes throughout, for the stakes in perceiving of a subject that can resist ontological and societal objectification are high. What is finally presented, by way of a diversion in Chapter Three - which takes Meillassoux's contingency to its *nth* degree - is a subject that, as an Art statement, can be seen to exist in a thoroughly null and chaotic realm, on the ontological and metaphysical level *and* as within a socially objectified whole.

The subject will not be extricated from objectivity or from domination for a mere overturning of conditions from within. It will have to engage, rather, with the conditions of its being, which allow only for its existence as a recognition of its apparent impossibility as separate from the object (nature, and the certainty of 'death'). Adorno's 'shudder', as the moment at which the subject becomes aware of its objectivity, and at the same time, *of its awareness of its objectivity* - and therefore of its unique capacity for the perception and interpretation of objective existence - has been utilised as a means for the subject to exist in spite of the impossibility of its existence.

At the same time, nothing has been gifted to subjectivity. In fact, subjectivity has been sacrificed to a thorough going nihilism, as a foil to the notion of Adornian hope as a weak sop to the harsh realities of existence. A factor which then sees the restitution to Adorno's thought of the subtlety and precision with which it treats of the notion of subjectivity in the face of its impossibility. It is in this interest that Ray Brassier's *Nihil Unbound* has been referred to, principally in Chapter One, where it is set up as the problem for which the shudder in relation to the modern artwork is seen as a partial counter in Chapter Two.

It is the capacity of Art (capitalised, as 'Art' becomes throughout the study an impossible evangel for an existence that cannot take place, but does anyhow) for deception which led to its consideration in Chapters Two and Three, where the shudder is posited as capable of restoring the subject, but only in conjunction with a radically conceptual artwork, in light of the impossibility of any given material artwork transcending the auspices of capital. An appeal to conceptualism tallies with a central tenet of this study, that if Art is to aid the subject in resisting complete objectification, it must be an art form devoid of physical form: The artwork, in resisting objectivity *must not exist*. It then falls to the pure concept to perform what the artwork previously had. This will be deemed as a

'conceptual turn', in that it represents the necessity that Art migrate into the conceptual realm if it is to be utilised to restore the subject in a thoroughly objective realm.

Chapter Three assesses the conceptual artwork for its social potential, seeing in the artistic readymade an amplification of Adorno's 'absolute commodity', whereby the artwork mimics the commodity form in claiming to be something beyond the sum of its parts; i.e. in claiming to be free from exchange values (this being one example of its capacity for deception). In the case of the 'readymade', a simple object - which is not even worked upon by the artist - is declared as 'Art', giving it a status superior to that of the mere object (which it in fact *is*). Such a mechanism has the contradictory result of making the readymade artwork desirable as a purchase and as a product to be sold, thus ridding it of its critical value as 'Art'. This 'absolute commodity exchange' necessitates that Art migrate from the objective to the purely conceptual realm (again, a 'conceptual turn'). This notion is explored via a combining of Duchampianism (anything can be art) with Beuys' declaration that 'we are all artists'. This 'Duchampian-Beuysian turn' allows the subject to declare itself as 'Art' (or as 'a subject'), leading, via this deception, to the existence of the subject as separate from the object; i.e. as beyond mere objectivity.

If such a deception is problematic it is arguably where it clashes with the reductive analysis of Scientific Philosophy. For the declaration of something (here, the subject) as Art can always be reduced to the chemical reactions in the brain of the subject that make such a declaration possible in thought. However, this criticism accords precisely with the underlying faulty assumption of Scientific Philosophy in its attempt to reverse Kant's Copernican turn. Such a reversal is well founded in that the Kantian prohibition on modes of knowledge aimed at the great outdoors (the world beyond the subjective mind) has resulted in an inward looking philosophy whereby the subject appears to be credited with constituting existence, as a kind of Philosopher-Lord, who casts an unknowable reality in his own image. However, Scientific Philosophy commits precisely the error it

mitigates against where, in assuming absolute knowledge to be impossible, it imposes rigid assumptions onto a reality that it cannot know. This is demonstrated in Chapter One with regard to Nihil Unbound and is further explored in Chapter Three with regard to Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*. The latter work, in its critique of the thorough going subjectivity (to the extent of outright Idealism) that Post-Kantianism has promoted aims with urgency to undo a situation in which the injunction against thinking absolutes, apart from leading to the projection of anthropomorphic reality onto an unknowable exterior, also permits of any extremism, for the uncertainty which Kantianism fosters means no creed, however unreasonable, can be denounced. The result is that tolerance must yield to intolerance. A fundamental underlying political concern which ought not to be overlooked in critique of Meillassoux, despite the fleetingness of the latter's reference to the political in *After Finitude*.

Meillassoux's response is to undo Post-Kantianism via a consideration of the 'Arche Fossil' and of Humean metaphysics. Meillassoux's innovation resides in a jettisoning of the principle of causality in favour a radical contingency whereby physical laws, rather than being necessary to human perception and thereby inalienable from a philosophical point of view, are impermanent and subject to constant change. This not only accounts for a time anterior to human time (evidenced by the Arche Fossil), but also brings about the possibility of there coming into existence a Deity in the future.<sup>2</sup> The maintenance of linear time within a system that is otherwise completely contingent is the principle error identified in Meillassoux's thought here. For where Meillassoux's contingency of existence might otherwise evoke a nihilism of boundless possibility flanked (as with Brassier's twin objectifiers) by two absolutes - the Arche Fossil and the coming Deity - which reduce the artistic statement to insignificance, it actually falls short for its adherence to temporality, even if what is evoked is a temporality before and after human

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<sup>2</sup> An idea outlined in Meillassoux's essay *Spectral Dilemma* which appeared in *Collapse*, Volume 4, and which will be expounded upon in his yet to be published Doctoral thesis *L'Inexistence Divine*, upon which this study cannot comment.

existence (the Arche Fossil and the coming Deity). Meillassoux falls short in proposing an apparently rational *absolute* contingency as a challenge to political and religious extremism (which the reader must recall as being a central target of Meillassoux's critique), in that the absolutism of Meillassoux's claim lacks the confidence to seize on the most extreme implications of the through going contingency identified in the same study. A prohibition on the possibility of contradiction (for contingency must be sacrosanct and inviolable if absolutism is to be held at bay) casts reality in the mould of what is conceivable for the subject. Yet who is to say that boundless contradiction is not the condition of existence, on limitless fronts?

It is here argued that, as with Brassier, Meillassoux fails to seize on the radical extreme suggested by his own theory. Absolute contingency, if considered at all, must be contingent absolutely, and temporality must thus be sacrificed, making the challenge thrown to the subject by a time anterior to human time irrelevant. For once time is collapsed then all things must be permitted, all of the time, with the subject forming a retina onto experience, which perceives only limited forms within the null Shape of Nothingness, which is comprised of limitless (albeit null) possibility. Within this empty form, which presents endless objective possibilities, only the artistic statement can be equal to the utterly nihilising and terrifying inference faced by the subject: Everything is possible, *now*. For only an artistic statement can admit of such a reality in fact and then declare, against it, the subject to be both stable and existent. The fact of such a statement being made only on account of the delusory apparatus of the subject becomes irrelevant for the impossibility of mounting an absolute and unfaulted factual claim in null and utterly chaotic realm. For the delusory apparatus of the subject itself can be declared as Art, giving credence to subjective 'experience' precisely as delusory. The 'shudder' thereby occurs as an Artistic self declaration of subjectivity in spite of its impossibility; the the 'conceptual turn' which is mentioned in the title of this study.

The aim of this study is, in short, to restore subjectivity whilst admitting of the subject's base objectivity. This is achieved by arguing to the extremes, taking both Brassier's nihilism and Meillassoux's contingency to their nth degree as a hyperbolic extension of the conditions least conducive to subjectivity. From here a restitution of the subject is attempted via a conceptual art declaration which is posited as an appropriation of Adorno's shudder. It is intended that in this way the subject can be posited as necessary to experience so far as we can know it - even under the least conducive of conditions for subjectivity - , though not essential to objective existence itself.

## Chapter One

*Nihilism. Noun.* 1 The rejection of all religious and moral principles. 2 Philosophy: extreme scepticism, maintaining that nothing has a real existence. Origin from Latin *nihil* meaning 'nothing'.

---Policing Nihil: Chapter Foreword---

Nihilism has historically been seen as a philosophical refuge for adolescent depressives, artists, Anarchists, Punk Rockers and a myriad of other perceived misfits, to whom the notion of 'no meaning' in life presents a thrilling divergence from the obligation to duty (to work, to love, to maintain a tidy bedroom) that characterises the hum-drum of a life with meaning.

Likewise, thought's darkest trend holds some kind of allure for modern philosophy, and that allure indicates a promise of annihilation that goes far beyond the actual delivery (as proof) of this promise in any philosophical text written thus far. That is to say, the colloquial understanding of nihilism at its most potent, the idea that *we do not exist*, has never - it will be here argued - been convincingly evinced in its philosophical exploration.

Adorno gives a reliable account of nihilism's genesis in *ND*:

Associated with slogans of 'emptiness' and 'senselessness' is that of 'Nihilism'. Jacobi first put the terms to philosophical use and Nietzsche adopted it, presumably from newspaper accounts or terrorist attacks in Russia. With an irony to which our ears have been dulled in the meantime he used the word to denounce the opposite of what

it meant in the practice of political conspirators: to denounce Christianity as the institutionalised negation of the will to live.

Philosophers would not give up the word anymore. In a direction contrary to Nietzsche's, they re-functioned it conformistically into the epitome of a condition that was accused, or was accusing itself, of being null and void.<sup>3</sup>

With his nod towards the existential nihilism of Sartre and Camus, Adorno here historically sums up nihilism as an effective refusal of all that *is*, politically, socially, existentially - a refusal that runs at odds with itself, inasmuch as a refusal must be a refusal of something. That such a tendency actually came about as a refusal of the nullity wrought by the moralising influence of the Church can be seen clearly in the affirmative and Vitalist tendencies of nihilist philosophies which - following on Nietzsche - , whilst refuting God and intrinsic 'meaning' in life, bear an affirmative aspect all the same. Like dark theologies, the work of Georges Bataille, Gilles Deleuze and Nick Land, amongst others, give the lie to nihil itself, for far from being '*nil*', as its name suggests, nihilism all too often harbours an irrecusable trace of its opposite, which explodes into 'being'.

Though nihilism arguably gained some coherence in terms of an absolute 'nullity', as the postmodern 'incredulity towards metanarratives' of Lyotard - fragmenting reality and making all truths equidistant from any possible verification<sup>4</sup> - it is doubtful that this would have matched Adorno's criteria for reasonable thought, had he been around to critique it. As for Adorno, whilst there can be no simple overarching grand schema, aside from the utter fragmentation of political activity that is a contradictory side effect of social homogenisation, this does not excuse a submission to such conditions, any more than it justifies a wishful and insubstantial projection of escape from them. Indeed, arguably, Adorno's 'hope' comes about as a result of a complete social fragmentation, on

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<sup>3</sup> Adorno T.W. *Negative Dialectics*, Routledge, 1973, p379

<sup>4</sup> A tendency amplified by Quentin Meillassoux, as will be seen later in this study.



account of a homogenisation of the numerical count (numbers being fragments of a whole), which is inadequate to the seamless whole of existence itself. This 'hope' is a registering of the inadequacy of ratio and capital to the non-identical reality that underlays the false consciousness of society. So long as non-identical reality is held at bay hope persists, as the possibility of escape from the fragmented societal whole. In this sense, complete fragmentation is a perversion of reality, yet the non-identical, being precisely beyond identification, can never be a refuge from that perversion. Hope therefore marks a refuge from a nullity which has two sides; 'primary' (the non-identifiable) and 'secondary' (fragmentation bought about by ratio) nature.

But whilst Adorno's hope may be posited as a counter to postmodernity's absolute dearth of meaning, Brassier's '*Nihil Unbound*' aims to pull out the proverbial rug from beneath the feet of hope itself.

First published in 2007, *NU*, has achieved a cult-status for those commentators vehemently opposed to what is seen as an extreme reductive nihilism as much as for those who seek to eke out the possibilities hinted at by Brassier's fleeting and cryptic references to the positive reflection which the absolutely certain extinction of the Universe - among other factors - may cast on the philosophical subject 'bound by extinction'.

Going on either interpretation, Brassier's work certainly innovates in the direction of absolute nullity, being that it casts the human subject as both 'dead' and 'extinct', due not only to its objective complexion but, further, to its position as sandwiched between the nullifying temporal slices that science serves up in terms of there being proof of 'matter' having existed before molecular life came into being (the 'Arche Fossil' which Brassier borrows from Meillassoux) and of there being an apparently accurate forecast of a certain end to the Universe billions of years in the future. These two temporal finalities

meet Brassier's identification of the subject as being 'thought by the object', following on his analyses of Adorno and Laruelle (bridged by accounts of Meillassoux and Badiou), taken in conjunction with the findings of neuroscience (the human subject is a mere chemical organism), in a move that near-convincingly voids the subject of any privileged sense of 'being' upon a basis that goes beyond the said subject's temporal rootedness between two finite 'ends'.

It is the unfashionable reinvestment of this sense of privileged being that this first chapter aims towards; albeit a being that carries with it a responsibility to acknowledge the 'object' within which that being, as subject, is concatenated.

One trouble in arguing for such a privileged status - and the reader is asked to forgive a deferral in approaching Brassier's texts for the time being so that the motive behind approaching them can be further explicated - is that nihilism has a perpetually resurgent capacity: it takes not the form of a fallen house of cards, but of an eternal domino rally, whereby each nihilist argument positing the non-existence of life meets with the living subject, pointing, in its 'living', to the absurdity of the nihilist's reduction, before being toppled by nihil as the subject simultaneously realises its objectivity (its mortality). And so on, and on.

This is simply, without recourse to any extreme 'life-annihilating' nihilistic texts, of which few, if any, actually exist - Nietzsche, as already stated, being a misunderstood anti-nihilist, to the perceived nihilism of the Church - the quandary nihilism, and its opposite, find themselves within. Nihil cannot account for life's resistance to it, and yet it can perpetually points towards life's absolute nullity, unless life can seize the suggestion of that nullity and reduce it through corrective, or 'curative', interaction with it.

Yet, as suggested, 'policing nihil', so as to reign it in and make it less volatile, is a thankless task: Imagine, in a heroic dream, being sherrif-deputised on behalf of 'life' to go and fight the good fight against philosophy's darkest son; you are given armour that no argument can pierce, and rockets capable of destroying any counter insurgency. The problem? - You still don't exist (and you're a deluded moron-subject if you think you do!): The potency of any argument as to life's inherent meaning will always be met with its abject opposite, effortlessly. The only seeming solution is to comport life to nihilism, so that the latter can no more crush the former.

---Towards a Pathetic Subjectivity---

'Philosophers would do well to desist from issuing any further injunctions about the need to re-establish the meaningfulness of existence, the purposefulness of life, or mend the shattered concord between mind and nature. Philosophy should be more than a sop to the pathetic twinge of human self esteem.'<sup>5</sup>

This first chapter aims to set up a dialogue in which Brassier and Adorno are played against each other – the latter being examined in more depth in Chapter Two – in the comprehension of an extreme form of nihilism within which life will be seen to be embedded negatively and with no reprieve. In keeping with the methodology of this study, which aims at a hyperbolic extrapolation of the potentials of both 'nihilism' and 'hope'.

This negative existence will be called the 'Shape of Nothingness', and aims at accounting for the existence of subjective 'being' as comported to the abstract nullity that characterises nihilism - i.e. as an element of that 'Shape' . In undertaking this dialogue Brassier's critique of Adorno in *NU* will be found to be lacking, a point that will be

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<sup>5</sup> Brassier R., *Ibid.*, p12

utilised in both strengthening and overturning the nihilist cause (strengthening it in making it plausible - via the 'Shape of Nothingness' - yet undermining it in appending 'life' to it). In so doing, a form of nihilism will be conceived of that is both more thorough than that which Brassier puts forward, and yet more extreme than Adorno accounted for in his opposition to nihilism, the remedy for which will be a comportment of Adornianism to nihilism, in order to eke out the semblance of life that persists in the negative 'whole' of existence. Though the potential of this encounter will be fully realised in Chapters Two and Three, in which a through account of Adorno's shudder and its applications within a contemporary philosophical, societal and cultural context will be further examined.

Brassier will be taken to be to be the most extreme of a new ilk of philosopher's grouped together under various terms such “Speculative Realism” (Brassier's term, though one that he has distanced himself from), “Speculative Materialism” (Meillassoux's term) “Object Oriented Philosophy” and “Object Oriented Ontology” (Harman's and Levi Bryant's terms, respectively), who collectively aim at the overturning of Post-Kantian thought and the dialectical method. For ease 'Scientistic Philosophies' - philosophies which have at their base a belief in objective fact, and which, further, hold the centrality of the subject within post-Kantian philosophy to be an arrogance which impedes the ability of philosophy to ascertain 'truth' - will here be used as an umbrella term, though it must be stressed that it is Brassier's Scientistic Philosophy (*SP*) to which this chapter principally refers, and not to Harman's, Latour's, Meillassoux's or Iain Hamilton Grant's, unless otherwise stated.

The rescue of a 'pathetic' subject-centred philosophy, if it is possible, owes its possibility to the lack of thoroughness in Brassier's critique of Adorno as well as to the overall extreme bias of his account, as will be discussed. In later considering Adorno's thought in Chapter Two what Brassier has missed in his own account - which will be explored

shortly - will be uncovered. 'Hope' is inscribed merely as the existence of wishful thinking in the minds of subjects that are in reality objects - as concatenated within 'nature' - , and the Adornian 'shudder', as the realisation of that fact, redoubles hope as the awareness of the possibility that humans can convincingly feign 'existence', as a feigning of the pervasiveness of life over death, of life's irrevocable 'living'. A feigning which is as 'real' and as rationally justifiable as any other factor which makes up the whole of 'existence', being as it presupposes the pervasiveness of the object, and the material basis of human thought. For Adorno this shudder takes place in front of the radically new and unknowable artwork, which is apparently resistant, due to its novelty, to categorisation at the hands of the reifying auspices of rationality. In Chapters Two and Three, this assumption regarding the artwork will be challenged due to art's proximity to capital, and to the all encompassing nature of rationality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Of course, all things considered, the difference between Brassier's account of nihilism, wherein the subject is merely deluded that it exists, and Adorno's dialectical system in which the subject feigns existence is narrow, as will be seen. Certainly this study does not wish to maintain that the subject has sovereign capacities over the object given from on-high, or, indeed, the same capacity existent as a secular-Idealistic condition of being, whereby man is a random but vital facet of existence due to the perceived impossibility for thought (both scientific or philosophical) of surpassing the centrality *of* thought to its construction of existence. What then is to be 'rescued' in the face of *SP* if its underlying contention against the 'correlation' between subject and object is not contended, and if the subject's existence is seen as a mere deception on the part of an object that poses as a subject which 'lives'?

Principally speaking, it is philosophical method - 'thought', the subject's vehicle - which stands to be saved in the face of its being reduced to a foot servant to Scientific Rationalism. An essential consideration which must be explored before the issue of the

subject's rescue via 'Art' - as a political gesture - in the face of societal objectification can be considered in the final chapter. What will be argued in this second chapter is that *SP* elevates the object whilst eliminating the subject - or 'reducing' it as an equivalent among equal objects, in the case of Harman's thought - whilst accusing subject based philosophy of overstepping its jurisdiction in arrogantly assuming the dominance of the subject, when in actuality it is arguably *SP* that oversteps its mark in assuming the philosopher (subject) to know the realm of the object, as will be explained in due course. In so arguing, rationalism is not to be challenged *per se* but is asked to re-assume limitations, lest it overstep its remit and objectifies all existence in such a way as to miss what is inherent in that objectivity *for* the subject-as-object; what is necessary for life as such. The value of such a project could be sneered at, rationally speaking. Why should philosophy stoop so low as to seek to protect the cause of humanity, or indeed of 'being', if that being has no privileged basis in 'truth'?

It will here be argued that in demarcating and salvaging the basis of the subject's being - as subjective thought, albeit objectively construed - philosophy does not present a cowardly case of 'nimby'-ism (i.e. 'not in my back yard!; you can reduce the universe to molecules, and animals to inestate processes, but we draw the line at the sacrosanct realm of the *philosophical* subject.'). Rather, such a rescue aims to reinstate the subject as existent despite its being objectively construed; there is a rationally viable lacuna in experience which resists the absolute nullification of an extreme nihilism, from within.

Otherwise put, the principle aim of this chapter is to take the challenge that nihilism puts forward and make it accountable to the existence of the subject, rather than losing the site of the latter as philosophy becomes in thrall to the object:

In so doing it will be possible to pave the way for a consideration of Adorno's shudder and the value of 'art' in restoring the subject in Chapter Two.

---Inhabiting the Shape of Nothingness---

Brassier's attempt to cut a path through the mess left by one-and-a-half centuries of reductive (in the sense that life is reduced to nothing, but also in the sense of being reductionist - *i.e* over simplistic) bleating in his 'Nihil Unbound' unfortunately does little to elevate philosophy's darkest - and to be fair, arguably most misunderstood - trend.

Brassier's trouble, it will be here argued, is one that nihilism suffers in general. Tread the corridors of any philosophy department and eavesdrop upon the wise stragglers - those running late for class - and you will learn that nihilism '*doesn't* exist' and is therefore '*nothing* to worry about'. As flippant as it is, the first of these quips (which we will call the 'Undergraduate Hypothesis') actually hints at the root of the principle objection to be raised here: Nihilism performs the contradictory feat of declaring life to have no inherent meaning (*ala* Nietzsche) or, indeed to not exist (*ala* Brassier's subject, as 'extinct' and 'dead') only on account of the existence of the philosopher (or other commentator) who voices this perspective, belief or 'meaning'. Yet in this form such an argument is weak because the nihilist could counter that the space that the subject 'inhabits' - existence *per se* - is the true form of nothingness, and that human dialogue, interaction and experience - along with everything else that 'exists' 'animal', 'mineral' or 'vegetable' - is part of that shape of nothingness. From hereon this will be called the 'Shape of Nothingness' theory. To give this theory one overarching definition:

'Shape of Nothingness': The theory that the whole of existence which can be known, whether that be material (i.e. Planet Earth, the Solar System, The Universe, Parallel Universes, animals and people, cars, trees, everything which has a form), thought (the inner life of the subject, ideas, dreams, etc) or interaction (conversation, utterances, collisions between objects, forces acting upon objects, etc) exists on one plane of existence as inconsequential and unmeaning and, moreover, as non-existent. Upon this

basis the standard rejection of nihilism (what is now termed the 'Undergraduate Hypothesis', which states that nihilism is flawed in its rejection of existence, in that it must exist in order to proclaim its non-existence) can now be overturned in that any utterance as to the non-existence of man, or of life, can be seen to be merely an utterance existing on the plane of the 'Shape of Nothingness'. In short, 'being' is 'nothingness'.

Arguably, the 'Shape of Nothingness' theory pervades *SP* as a grounding enabler of its cause. It could, for example, be said to underpin the work of the most prominent practitioners of *SP* - Brassier, Harman and Meillassoux, who operate, respectively; a 'reductive nihilism', a 'reductionism of equivalences', and a 'nihilism of boundless possibility'.

It is necessary here to briefly digress in undertaking a summary comparison of these three thinkers, in order to justify the treatment of Brassier as the principle target of this chapter, and alleviate the risk of any defender of *SP* proposing that where Brassier might here fall short, Harman, for example, may be found to be more congenial to the cause of this study. Meillassoux will be returned to in Chapter Three.

---At the forefront of *SP*---

Brassier, Meillassoux and Harman - three very different thinkers linked at one brief point under the collective moniker 'Speculative Realism' - find agreement at least on the object of their mutual derision, which is principally any philosophy which holds the subject to be central to existence *per se*. Where Brassier focuses principally upon the reduction of man to material, and the ontological result of that manoeuvre, in a way that - it will be argued - is peculiarly oriented towards the philosophical subject even in the latter's annihilation, Harman finds an equivalence of values across objects. These are all seen to be monadic in themselves, but similarly capable of acting upon one another, this acting, as a 'vicarious causation', constituting those objects - including humans - in and of themselves, but only at the moment of their relation with other objects. This principle



innovation being in line with but diverging from Bruno Latour's notion that nothing in the way of a superior overseeing agent (such as a 'subject' or a 'God') is needed in order that objects (including subjects, which are deemed to be objects) 'act' (they are self-constituting at the moment of interaction with one another). A further innovation of Harman's resides in his notion that objects may exist in themselves - though they only 'act' in accordance with other objects - and may have unknown inner essences that are resistant to the philosophical subject. So the subject does not think the object, but is, rather, bought into existence in its relation to other objects as a human object. This does not, Harman argues, belittle the subject; such a notion merely plays up to the arrogance of Kantian philosophies. However, an equivalence of value is established between subjects and objects, and whilst one might agree with Harman that there is something worthy, touching, even, in the notion of a non-stratified world populated by ever shifting independent objects that 'act' upon one another in myriad ways, it is also evident that if there is no overarching, or even feigned accreditation of a 'meaning' to 'life' (that is the 'life' of the subject, the 'life' that 'lives' from Chapter One), which somehow extricates itself from the daily plodding of objects meeting in the dark, what one is presented with is the aforementioned 'Shape of Nothingness' - as a plane of existence upon which objects as actors play out their roles with no superior role or function given over to any one of them<sup>6</sup> - the only escape from which (other than the proclamation, perhaps via the 'shudder' as argued in Chapter One of the subject having 'life' in spite of its complicity with the object, 'death') would be a return to animism (i.e. a declaration of meaning for the object). Indeed, Harman goes one step further in arguing for an as yet not fully construed 'pan-psychism' which calls for, "a 'speculative psychology dedicated to ferreting out the specific psychic reality of earthworms, dust, armies, chalk and stone.'"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> One can only see this working if the natural tendency to hierarchize, say, a bee over a flower, or a lion over an antelope is consigned itself to be an object, as thought. Indeed Harman does categorise thoughts as objects. Though this raises the question that if everything is an object and thoughts are objects, then thought resounds as an object of particular import, as the 'subject' which is, again, unique in its objectivity for its self awareness.

<sup>7</sup> Harman G. *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, 2009, re.press, Melbourne, p213

Whatever the merits of Harman's thought, his insistence that even thoughts are objects, which should be accorded equal value on the objective plane of existence, leaves him exposed in that if a thought is an object and if each object is uniquely what it purports to be, then the (correlationist) thought of the subject's superiority over the object has to be accorded some value at the point at which it comes into contact with the objective realm. In short, his equivalence of objects, which takes as real everything that an object uniquely *is*, cannot by its own definition put a distinct value upon one object over another. Rather, according to Harman, objects gain strength only in the alliances they build, in terms of how many other objects act upon/with them in the course of their interactions. If this was the case, then the question over how much sway the notion that the subject is superior to the object holds, would depend on how many allies that notion could amass. Yet to say that such a 'notion' could amass objects as allies is nonsensical, in that the amassing of such objects as allies is a matter purely for subjective judgment under the terms of that notion. One could not argue that each and every object appears to have allied itself with the subject on account of the subject's seeming superiority for the object, because one has no way of disproving that it were merely the subject (as a thought-object) that held that to be the case on the basis of the propensity of that subject (as a thought-object) to do so. Once one has reduced all phenomena to an objective minestrone of equivalences, whilst maintaining the integrity of all of its ingredients, including the thought which attests to the existence of that said metaphysical soup, you have a thought system which cannot but weld tomato, croutons and diced carrot to that thought. The only other option is to write off thought as the meaningless registering of effects that issue from the interaction of objects: The world of objects are an austere *consomme* to which thoughts are but a mechanical fly, which one can't get rid of easily. As the latter option is too reductionist for Harman, who is adverse to Brassier's extreme nihilism, it could be argued that Harman's thought suffers under the weight of what might be described as a hyper-democracy, presided over by a shadowy dishonest figurehead; the objective reality of equivalences, in which the subject is embedded, but over which the subject holds court as

a secretive despot. Or, put more succinctly; how can a philosophy which accounts for itself as a mere player among players, explain its role as director and critic of the said 'play'? To see anything other than a ruse in such a thought would be to become precisely as sentimental as Brassier accuses the correlationist of being. A world in which all objects and people are equivalent and in which the unique characteristics of each object - bubblegum, human, US expansionism, the Beatles, South Africa, the relics of the Cross, a Fiat 500 and rotten pears - were not seen as having any significance which could be stratified smacks of Lovecraft meets the Get-Along-Gang. Incidentally this is not an objection that can be held against the Shape of Nothingness as here construed, for in the latter, equivalences are reduced to nothing, along with everything else. All things are not equivalent, but are, rather, 'nothing'; there is nothing around which equivalences can be formed.

Meillassoux's novel circumvention of the correlational bind - the necessity that subject and object must co-exist - involves a highly speculative, though well-reasoned, if not unsettling from-a-day-to-day purview - jettisoning of the notion of a stable Universe (both for thought and in actuality) in favour of an absolute contingency, whereby anything can happen at any time, except for an overthrowing of the central principle of contingency. In the course of Meillassoux arriving at the above conclusion, the notion of the 'Arche Fossil' is introduced - as will be discussed in greater depth later. The 'Arche Fossil' is the trace, registered by scientific equipment, of material activity that pre-existed the formation of cellular forms and is utilised to challenge Kant's mind-centric conception of philosophy, the overcoming of which is central to Meillassoux's project, with *After Finitude*, his first published work, posing the question of how mathematics might elide the correlationist bind. For now, it will be argued that the possibility of *anything* happening at any time necessitates the existence of a kind of 'Shape of Nothingness' though one that operates not so much as a singular plane upon which all events play out their meaningless routine, but more as a blank slate upon which anything

can - and does - come into play, but upon which nothing ever gains a footing. All things are equally dispensable and the centrality of the subject is a fallacy displaced by both the proof of bodies that precede it, and the possibility of its demise at any given moment. Absolute contingency nullifies the importance of all phenomena, however real they may seem in the now. Moreover, it temporalises the Shape of Nothingness, as a nothingness which expands outwards for all of time ('time', which is itself reduced to nothing), and is beyond rescue in terms of a potential future transformation into 'something', for such a transformation would remain subject to the rules of contingency. As such that 'something' would exist as only one of a myriad of possibilities existing simultaneously. More on this in Chapter Three.

It must be stated at this point that Meillassoux's target is not correlationism *per se*, but the the notion of cause and effect, which he attempts to wrest from correlationism, arguing that existence is mathematizable, but in such a way that mathematics resists subjectification. Yet one could be left asking precisely who existence is contingent *for*, if not for the subject. *Ala* Badiou - who, as a rare example of a biographical detail that even philosophy cannot resist, supervised Meillassoux's doctoral thesis - Meillassoux reduces everything to an overarching *matheme*, which he does not even, perhaps thankfully, go on to explicate fully in *After Finitude*. Though one really cannot help but wonder if Badiou's and, by extension, Meillassoux's insistence that everything is reducible to mathematics comes about for a shared love of maths? Just as, if one had asked Vincent Van Gogh what life was really all about, he may have said 'paint', on those days when he didn't feel moved to say 'God'.

Putting aside such polemics, for now, it is enough to say there is an interminable bias in *After Finitude*. This is most evident in Meillassoux's treatment of the 'Copernican turn', which he likens to a Ptolemaic 'counter revolution'. Put simply, where the original Copernican revolution entailed Copernicus's identification of the true nature of the solar system, with the sun in the centre, and the Earth being just one of many planets revolving

around it, Kant's Copernican turn reneges on the revolutionary scientific value of this judgment by placing the subject at the centre of existence. Meillassoux thus cries 'deception': philosophy has neutered what was great in Copernicus's finding, and with it has become some kind of quasi-mystical game in which thinkers vie against each other in devising ever more obscure formulations in order to counteract the obvious truth which science shows us re; our base objectivity.<sup>8</sup>

Yet what Meillassoux misses is the crucial part that Kant's Copernican turn plays in assuring that rational enquiry does not overstep its bounds and monopolise objective existence. Taking the Copernican analogy, it is possible to see Kant as saying 'the Sun is the centre of the Universe, and it is for that reason that we must limit our observations to the periphery', rather than claiming to *know* the centre. For who can 'know' the Sun? In this way one can gradually move towards the centre through technological advance and rational enquiry. Meillassoux, on the other hand, wants to fly to the Sun, hijack it, and aim its rays so as to burn out the eyes of its philosophical observer, which are apparently inferior to mathematical forms (which are, the reader is told, human-derived, only incidentally), whilst admitting that the issue over whether such forms can be independent of humans is problematic.<sup>9</sup> Yet, it is this precise problem - the impossibility of knowing for sure what resides outside the human mind - which led Kant to put safeguards in place, in the manner of his Copernican turn, so that thinkers would not develop obscure speculative stances which threaten the integrity of both subject and object.

Even if one was to take on board Meillassoux's contingency, it does not seem possible to shift the subject as the unique witness of this contingency, so long as the subject exists for now. These points will be further addressed in more depth in Chapter Three.

What is of principle importance for this chapter is the extent to which neither Meillassoux nor Harman can be seen as providing the saving grace for Brassier's *SP*: i.e

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<sup>8</sup> Meillassoux Q. *After Finitude*, Continuum, 2006, pp118-121

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp126-128

they can make it no less palatable for opponents of *SP* and no more viable on its own terms. Whilst, for example, there is nothing in Harman's granting of equivalence to all objects as equally worthy of philosophical study which consigns the subject-as-object (the human) to the kind of objective irrelevance that Brassier consigns it to - in respect of its base objectivity - there is equally nothing in Harman's thought that directly comes up against Brassier's treatment of the subject as 'extinct'. And whilst the wonderment with which Harman sees objects is clear in his dedication to them, any attempt to rescue the subject by rescuing all objects as having 'meaning' (even as having 'psyches') runs the risk of falling so far into the camp of hopeful wishful thinking as to make it seem risible.

With regard to Meillassoux the case is more complex - too much so for it to be done full justice to until Chapter Three - , yet it is certainly Meillassoux's intention to reduce the philosophical subject as secondary to a mathematical discourse which must somehow be freed from the former. Such a project can certainly not be applied against Brassier's scientism. For now, the principle motivation of this digression has been to demonstrate that the subject can, for none of these three thinkers, be seen as having any divinely - or non-divine but otherwise arguably existent - animate majesty over the world of objects. For all three of these thinkers the subject need be ousted as the central operative factor at play in philosophical discourse. Yet it is Brassier who becomes the focus now because Brassier is most forthright in his dismissal of the subject as not just philosophically aloof - getting in the way of the identification of objective truth, as with the other two thinkers - but wholly non-credible as an entity which exists as anything other than a series of random chemical interactions in a Universe devoid of 'inherent' meaning. Brassier attacks the subject and any meaningful existence, whereas Harman and Meillassoux merely adjust the import of the subject to suit other ends: what might be termed, respectively, 'hyper-democratisation', and 'hyper-contingency'. The latter form will have implications for this study, but ones that are arguably reducible to a consideration of nullity, as contingency ultimately even renders temporality void (a point, again, to be discussed in Chapter Three).

---Shape of Nothingness---

Having considered the motives for approaching Brassier, it will be argued that the 'Shape of Nothingness' is ultimately a consequence of Brassier's radically reductive objective nihilism if taken to an extreme. An objectivity that he bases partly upon Laruelle's thought (though it is not the intention to address Laruelle's thought here but, rather, Brassier's appropriation of it).

Brassier argues in criticism of 'correlationism' as the Post-Kantian tendency to draw a correlate between objective existence and the subjective mind :

Laruelle's work challenges this correlationist consensus by proposing a version of transcendental realism wherein the object is no longer conceived of as a substance but rather as a discontinuous cut in the fabric of ontological synthesis. It is no longer thought that determines the object, whether through representation or intuition, but rather the object that seizes thought and forces it to think it, or better, *according* to it. As we have seen, this objective determination takes the form of a unilateral duality whereby the object thinks through the subject.<sup>10</sup>

Yet if, as Brassier here argues, the object is a 'discontinuous cut' in the fabric of a wider ontological existence, a plane upon which objects come into play as 'thought', in their seizing of that thought, then there is arguably a coming into being sufficient enough to constitute an 'existence' even as thought is being beholden to the object. This then raises a question - re; Brassier's nihilism - over why one doesn't just term 'nothingness' (lack of existence, or 'extinction' as Brassier would have it) - that continuous expanse of objectivity that is responsible for the illusory existence of the subject - as 'something' or 'some *thing*'? Not least because the form of 'nothingness' that the subject does arguably inhabit clearly exhibits enough subtle differences in its makeup to register the existence

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p149

of varied 'animate' and 'inanimate' phenomena within it (albeit 'null' phenomena). Nothingness itself is actually in this case the supposed flipside of the literal Shape of Nothingness (i.e. it is exterior to the realm of 'life' that in being 'lived' allows the subject to experience the varied tapestry of the 'Shape of Nothingness' which it inhabits). Or, rather, 'nothingness' as understood by the subject is the registering of 'nothing' relative to the occurrences that take place along the varied continuum of the 'Shape of Nothingness': it is 'death', the shadow of experience, which cannot itself be experienced, yet is a precondition upon which that experience is dialectically premised. Such a distinction, which distinguishes between the 'Shape of Nothingness' as the plane upon which the subject experiences their subjectivity from 'nothingness', and the loss of that subjectivity within that 'Shape of Nothingness', enables 'life' to 'live' even as concomitant within that wider Shape. The Adornian 'shudder', in this respect, manifests not only as a result of the fearful realisation of life's concatenation within death, but also as a result of the realisation of life's existence under the impossible condition of its opposite - i.e. nothingness. Nothingness is not mere death, it is an absolute void which happens to bear the shape of life and death – as facets of nothingness - within it.

This is not to equate Brassier's thought, the depth of which will become clear during this chapter, with the 'Shape of Nothingness', but, rather, it is to say that Shape of Nothingness is the consequence of a reductive nihilism, even where it reduces existence only part way to such a state. That is to say, that whilst Brassier (no subject), Nietzsche (no God), Sartre (no meaning) and the Sex Pistols ('no future') do not say at any point that literally 'nothing' exists, the effect of their reductive discourses amount to much the same, being that one cannot conceive of only 'half of nothing'. Here this notion is taken strategically to its extreme, in order to test subjectivity against the idea of its impossibility.

However, none of this is evidence of a lack in the subject - or, indeed, a lack of the subject - , and it is arguably Brassier's particular take on Laruelle's non-dialectical



method which so tellingly gives the lie to a nihilism of the purely objective bent, when contrasted with the conception of 'shudder' outlined in the introduction, but also when viewed in light of the 'Shape of Nothingness' theory which nihilism here evokes.

Key to understanding this take is an understanding of Laruelle's 'determination-in-the-last-instance' as utilised by Brassier. 'determination-in-the-last-instance', in the context employed in *NU*, signifies the moment at which the object is conceived on behalf of the subject that apprehends it, yet in reverse, so that at the last instant before apperception by - as would normally be held to be the case - the subject *of the* object, it is the object that conceives of the subject, which *is itself* object, again:

[...] by bequeathing the unilateralizing force of the last-instance to the object which has been transcendently given or objectified: instead of being objectively manifest as the correlate of an objectifying act, the object becomes the subject which determines its own objective manifestation; it is taken up *in* and *as* the agent of thinking which unilateralizes its own transcendent objectification.<sup>11</sup>

The overall effect of this process on dialectics - i.e. its dismissal of the latter - is seemingly Brassier's key motive for utilising Laruelle's thought in *Nihil Unbound*:

Thus the unilateral relation between X and Y has itself becomes unilateralized, shorn of its bilateral envelopment within objectifying thought, leaving only X's unilateralizing identity as known object which determines its own knowing subject, and the unilateralized difference between X and Y as synthesis of object and objectification. X is at once the determining subject and the determined object, and remains radically indifferent to the difference between X and Y, object and objectification (or determined object and subjective determination). Ultimately, where correlationism guarantees the ubiquity of the object by insisting that thinking remain

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p141

unobjectifiable, determination-in-the-last-instance dismantles objectification by turning thought itself into a thing.<sup>12</sup>

Put simply, under 'determination-in-the-last-instance' the relation between X and Y, object and subject, need not be thought of as even the thinking of X by Y (subject by object), but can rather be seen as *X, which is the thought of the object and its subject*. Thus the subject is eradicated in line with Brassier's wider opposition to dialectical method, not as a subsumption of the subject, nor an annihilation of it, but simply as it never existed other than as an illusion projected upon the subject by the object.

Here, Brassier's desire to eradicate the subject on so many levels in *NU* is rather telling. He seemingly eradicates the subject here, with recourse to the 'determination-in-the-last-instance' then deigns it necessary to eradicate it again later, by arguing, as will be discussed shortly, that the impending - yet distant - end of the Universe, implies its being extinct already (a notion borrowed from Lyotard's '*Solar Catastrophe*'). Yet if this first eradication (which is not actually the first basis of subject-annihilation outlined by Brassier in *NU*, which itself relates to Adorno, and which will be discussed later) is sufficient, why the need for a further eradication on quite different terms? This is perhaps indicative of Brassier conceding that even if he can eradicate the subject in an abstract ontological sense he still must contend with the concrete objective reality of the subject's existence from within that abstract object-oriented ontological plane of existence; i.e. the subject as unique object possessing a capacity for perception constitutive of philosophical thought. The 'Shape of Nothingness', which is arguably what Brassier institutes in objectifying thought, as thought *by* the object *of the* subject-which-is-object, concedes to the nihilist that we are indeed part of nothing, but then demands of them that they must institute a further nihilist reduction, lest the complexity of the 'shape' of that 'nothingness' be seen as sufficient in scope to allow for a subject to be secreted in through a 'ghost-exit' - a portal of 'some thing' cut out of the wall of nothing.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p141

It has so far been argued in this study that both 'subject' and 'object' - 'X' and 'Y', as could otherwise be expressed, are co-constituted in the moment of the 'shudder' as an axiomatic instance of life coming into being upon the realisation on the part of the subject (that *is* object) of its objectivity. This is the 'letting in' of the subject, via a tear in objectivity, which accords with the fact that of all the objects known to exist, one such object *is a subject*, so constituted by its propensity to perpetually realise its subjectivity; its *otherness* in relation to the object. Brassier seems to flatly contradict such a stance, arguing that subject and object are coexistent, but only as the object that fills the subject with objectivity in the axiomatic moment of 'determination-in-the-last-instance', thus eradicating the subject. The subject is 'pushed out' by the object.

Yet, it is possible to work some lowest common denominator algebra and simply invert Brassier's formula, in order to let that subject back in. Returning to the last quote:

X [the object] is at once the determining subject and the determined object, and remains radically indifferent to the difference between X and Y, object and objectification (or determined object and subjective determination).

And then in reverse:

Y (the subject) is at once the determining object and the determined subject, and remains radically indifferent to the difference between Y and X, object and objectification (or determined subject and objective determination).

What is perhaps most striking is the fact that nothing appears to change much from one version to the other. Yet on deeper inspection the reversal of Brassier's formulation reverses the total objectification that Brassier supposes to be evident for his appropriation

of Laruelle's thought. The subject, as object, has been moved back to the centre of the interplay between subject and object, i.e:

Y (the subject) is at once the determining object and the determined subject.

Yet this does not repeat the perceived hegemony of the subject accredited to correlationism by *SP*, as when subject and object become leveled as one, the subject:

...remains radically indifferent to the difference between Y and X, object and objectification (or determined subject and objective determination).

There is no need to over-reach philosophically in an extreme attempt to disregard the subject, because the former threatens no more a hegemony over existence *per se* than the object. For if subject and object are one (or are separate, but are both objective in their makeup), there is nothing in the way of a 'unity' (as X thinking Y) to bleat on about: It is the subject *and* object that are 'one'. They comprise that 'oneness' as 'subject *and* object' upon a plane of nothingness through which the subject recognises itself as existent for the realisation of its difference from the object, even if it is to be thought by the object. In fact, as concatenated within the object, the subject *is* 'thought' by the object (in that the subject is object), and yet as 'one' with that object there is nothing for the subject to resist when realising the falsity of its subjectivity. It is just such a realisation which constitutes subjectivity.

This is not to completely disregard the above quote by Brassier, it is to say, rather, that both Brassier's formulation *and its reversal* are correct when both are taken into account, yet the latter formation is correct without the former being taken into account, because the latter does not seek to eradicate the object, in the way that the former seeks to eradicate the subject.

The benefit of the formulation of the shudder laid out in the introduction, with the subject central to its realisation of its objectivity is that the subject can be credited with the obvious and clear fact of its existence as somehow different from the wider object that is not the individual subject ('you' or 'I'). The subject, even if 'thought' by the object *is* an object thought by that object as an object which holds (thinks) that thought as a thought bought about by the object for the subject-that-is-object. It is not, conversely, thought by the object for the object (of which the subject is a void part), because to assume this would be to assume to know the closed world of the object, and that would be to assume some transcendent capacity on the part of the subject to escape itself, despite 'it' (the subject) having been thought, ostensibly, by the object . One would then have an interplay between subject and object that ends with the subject's casting of its knowledge upon, and inside, the object in order to know the reality of the object's superiority over the subject in its thinking of the latter.

It could indeed be argued with regard to Brassier's thought that it would have been less of an Idealist move to, as has been here argued with regard to the shudder in Chapter One, have the subject constituted in its interaction with the object, as an object with a unique knowledge of its objectivity, than to reduce everything to objectivity, whilst claiming to have a unique purview over that objectivity. In light of this, the *SP* practitioner might say 'I know existence is objective, as it is not subjective, because subjectivity does not exist aside from the object.' But then, is not objectivity the flipside of subjectivity, and does that not point to a fundamental contradiction for *SP*? Yet, of course, the *SP* pioneer cannot be expected to think outside language, and any attempt to construe an objective philosophy (or indeed, a non-dialectical philosophy) will either fall prey to the antimony here described, or become hopelessly obscure, performing philosophical somersaults in order that the subject be eradicated. Yet, it is not enough to excuse the use of the words 'subject' and 'object' on the basis that these words are only used because we can only

think logically using words, as these words *do* actually point to a tangible reality; 'inside/outside'. And the dismissal of the interior pole of this dialectic surely either dictates that the philosopher speaks for the object as *the object*, in which case one might ask him what gives him his authority, and his impartiality, *or* implies that he is a privileged kind of philosopher-object, one that can exceed the bounds of objectivity - a subject, essentially -, as Brassier seems to hopelessly argue in the closing pages of *NU*, where he appeals to philosophy as the 'organon of extinction', accounting for the existence of the philosophical subject.

These last points beckon a deeper look to Brassier's critique of the dialectical method as outlined here:

Unilateralization hamstring dialectics. A unilateral duality is a structure comprising nonrelation— the object X as unilateralizing identity – and the relation of relation and nonrelation— objectifying thought as unilateralized difference between X and Y, identity and difference. Unlike more familiar instances of unilaterality in philosophy, which ultimately always retain two sides, the unilateral duality effectuated by determination-in-the-last-instance is a duality with only one side: the side of objectification as difference (relation) between X (non-relation) and Y (relation). Accordingly, where dialectics invariably orbits around the relation of relation and non-relation as apex of reflexivity – which is also the apex of idealist narcissism, since it converts every 'in-itself' into a 'for us' – the unilateral duality effectuated by determination-in-the-last-instance exemplifies an irreflexive and hence non-dialecticizable disjunction between objectifying transcendence and unobjectifiable immanence; one which embodies the non-relation of relation and non-relation. Unlike every variety of reflection, whether transcendental or dialectical, determination-in-the-last-instance effectuates a unilateral duality with only one side – the side of

objectifying transcendence. Since the latter is always two-sided, i.e. dialectical, determination-in-the-last-instance effectively unilateralizes dialectics. Thus unilateralization cannot be dialectically re-inscribed.<sup>13</sup>

Such non-dialectical thinking operates on account of a desire to split off the concomitance (as, arguably, dialectical poles are co-dependent) of two poles of a dialectic - 'subject and object', 'life and death' - in the creation of an apparently independent unified whole, i.e. the object as unilateralizing identity; Laruelle's non-dialectical unilateralization. That this conception of existence could be independent of the subject-object dichotomy naively attempts to circumvent what could be described as the principle failing here: the starting point for such a declaration (of a non-dialectical reality) has been an attempt to overcome the distinction between 'subject' and 'object'. On whose account, then, did a splitting between subject and object occur? If thought *must have thought* the split between subject and object, in its attempting to reconcile the two poles then, at the point that thought *thought* that *thought* it must be taken that such a split between subject and object existed *for* thought. Now, taking into consideration thought as an object, going on Brassier's account of Laruelle, we might further append it to the 'Shape of Nothingness', which is to say that it exists as a facet of the complexity of nothingness, even if it be a facet induced by chemical reactions in the brain of a subject which merely deludes itself as to its existence: thought exists on the plane of nothingness no less than life and death do, and this is no more cause for rejoice than for the existence of the latter. It just *is*.

If such a split did not exist for the 'thought' which exists within the Shape of Nothingness, but solely for the object, which reflects thought onto the subject, one wonders at what point the object imposed upon the subject the thought that the subject were part of a unilateral whole to which the subject (which is in fact object) responded by realising that

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p142

it need desist from thinking the split between itself and object, and begin thinking (on account of the object) its unity with the object and its debt to the object as the prime and sole motivator of thought.

How might any reconciliation between subject and object then have been approached other than through a further splitting from the initial point at which the subject realises its oneness with the object, its lack of subjectivity? It would entail an initial 'thought', *as* the subject's thinking of the reality of the object's predominance over all reality: the distinction between subject and object must be thought in order to think away its distinction, and if that thought might be thought in deed by the object, either as a wider object of which it is part, or as an individual object distinct from the subject, the fact remains that it is the casting of thought upon the subject, as the enactment of thought by that subject which institutes the subject as capable of thinking of the possibility of thought having an objective origin and basis. To argue otherwise assumes an untenable knowledge of the ostensibly real conditions of objective existence, so much so that in supposing the real conditions of subjectivity to be objective it is supposed that the subject can somehow elevate itself out of the illusory effect of its having a reality independent of the object, and it is further supposed that this would efface the reality of the subject to such an extent that one might declare it to not exist.

Further, the 'universal duality with only one side' which Brassier attempts to collapse the dialectic within posits itself, in any case, against a dialectic that possesses two sides in the mind of the subject. This is surely problematic as it admits of an existent polarity between, on the one hand, the existence of the notion of the dialectic *as* dialectic, and, on the other hand, the existence of the dialectic as unilateralized (as object) through determination-in-the-last-instance: That is, through the transcendental power of the object that, for Brassier, constitutes thought. This has to be damning, as dialectics is a symptom of thought, and of its limitations for the subject: to say that the objectification of thought completely rids us of dialectics somehow equates the source of thought (i.e. its arguable



objectivity), with its nature (i.e. what it thinks). The subject, as a basic fact of reality, and its perceived separation from the realm outside of itself, cannot be done away with by merely pointing to thought's concomitance with the object, as if that concomitance conveniently creates a blanket 'Nirvana' of a reality that has everything existing as one seamless whole. Non-dialectical philosophical forms are none other than the subjective pole of the dialectic reckoning its linkedness with the object. Now, as much as the subject's linkedness with the object be a certainty, its separation from the object is a condition of thought itself, even of the thought that 'wishes' away the subject-object dialectic.

It might even be conceded that reality operates as a unilateral duality with only one side, but to credit that reality entirely to the object with no acknowledgment of the role of the subject - which inheres on that same side - is to needlessly throw the subject out with the correlationist bathwater.

It is further arguable as a development of this last point that, being that a key feature of Brassier's thought is his opposition to human-centric forms of philosophy - essentially Kant's Copernican turn - he stands at fault in supposing the opposite of a mind-centred subjective reality to be one in which 'life' does not exist, on account of the thorough going objectivity envisaged.

This fault assumes a polarity - X and Y, 'subject' (existence/life) and 'object' (extinction/death) - the kind of which the human brain creates, but which, aside from human thought, does not exist, so far as can be ascertained.

Though, in this current form nihilism's principal undoing, it will be argued, resides in a further implication of the 'Shape of Nothingness', for upon the latter's basis - which allows for the spiriting in of existence within nothingness - one would have to assume a true nothingness to be one which 'exists' aside of the 'Shape of Nothingness' itself, but which this latter is embedded within, as only then can there be a 'nothing' relative to the

activity which characterises the 'shape' of that 'nothing' which the individual subject inhabits, sufficient to convince the subject of its utter nothingness. Arguably, without this grander overarching 'nothing' the subject's objectivity can merely be written off as part and parcel of one facet of the form of 'nothingness' (extinction/death) , which admits within it of the possibility of there existing what is termed 'life' (and the 'Undergraduate Hypothesis' is thus vindicated). A thorough going nihilism must suppose that if subject and object inhere on one pole of the dialectic, in the Shape of Nothingness, the other pole must consist of absolute nullity: The 'root of all nothingness', which gives form to the Shape of Nothingness.

The existence of a 'root of all nothingness' would bestow upon the 'Shape of Nothingness' a true lack of meaning, and upon 'life' a true lack of 'living' for the fact that there would be no grounding objective 'nothing' beyond the 'Shape of Nothingness' for the subject to distinguish itself against as a measure of itself. For the 'root of all nothingness' could not be a nothing to which the Shape of Nothing is a something, in the same way that the Shape of Nothingness acts as the 'nothing' to which the subject is 'something'. The root of all nothingness is, rather, a genuine lack of existence, and so cannot cast the Shape of all Nothingness into relief, but must, rather, petrify it.

Put simply, even the subject-that-is-object, which distinguishes itself in knowing itself to be object cannot further distinguish itself from the 'root of all nothingness', which as 'nothing' is not knowable and cannot be 'measured against'. Therefore, the 'root of all nothingness' effectively casts upon the 'Shape of Nothingness' a stone-like meaninglessness which the subject cannot elevate itself above from within, as there is nothing for the subject to elevate itself 'out' of, given the one dimensionality - absolute objectivity - of the Shape of Nothingness .

So the subject which distinguishes itself from the object maintains a base objectivity all along, as the 'root of all nothingness' casts even the thought of the subject-as-pure-objectivity as meaningless, against the 'root of all nothingness', which cannot be known,

but can only be hypothesized in its complete withdrawal from thought; in a word, 'nothing'. It does not exist.

In any case, the dialectic then persists - with the Shape of Nothingness on one pole, and the root-of-all-nothingness on the other - and absolute nihilism is realised, not as a destruction of the subject, but a complete nullification of existence, which all the while accounts for the perceived existence of the subject within it. The subject is painted black on black.

Moving on, it would be a mistake to term that 'root of all nothingness' as a 'nothing' in opposition to the 'some *thing*' maintained by the 'Shape of Nothingness' because to do so would imply a human aspect of judgment upon the nature of that 'root of all nothingness', and that would further imply a superiority of the subject - of the human mind - over even the realm (root of all nothingness) which has been invoked philosophically to prove the inadequacy of the subject and of existence *per se*. What a nihilist might most reasonably imply is that the 'root of all nothingness' can simply not be known in terms of its form and that the radical alterity that is opposed to the subjective realm need not present itself as a nothingness opposed to the subject's existence within the 'some *thing*' of the 'Shape of Nothingness'. Rather, it could be argued - if one were to uphold the nihilist cause - that whatever resides outside the perceptual limitations of the subject is beyond comprehension in thought, and it is this that marks out the centrality of the subject -and its limitations - within Post-Kantian philosophy, and not a wishful ploy on the part of Kant, or his descendants, to institute the mind as the source of the 'some *thing*', as is effectively argued by Brassier in respect to Kantian thought:

For all their various differences, post-Kantian philosophers can be said to share one fundamental conviction: that the idea of a world-in-itself, subsisting independently of our relation to it, is an absurdity. Objective reality must be transcendentally

guaranteed, whether by pure consciousness, intersubjective consensus, or a community of rational agents; without such guarantors, it is a metaphysical chimera.<sup>14</sup>

In opposition to this almost mantra like criticism of Post-Kantian thought - repeated in different forms by Brassier throughout *NU* - it is possible to conceive of a form of the Kantian Sublime which tallies with the notion of a 'root of all nothingness'. For Kant states in his Third Critique that the Sublime is that which is beyond the capacity of quantifiable thought, and as such is a consequence of the mechanism of subjective thought in relation to the sublime object, in that the subject attains after an estimation of a magnitude it cannot know in fact. So, it could be argued, that the hypothetical 'root of all nothingness' rebounds upon the subject in the latter's finitude, signaling the impossibility of 'thought' comprehending a 'beyond', which might reduce it as secondary to that beyond, for as Kant states in a generic explication of the sublime undertaken in the Third Critique:

... because there is in our Imagination a striving towards infinite progress, and in our Reason a claim for absolute totality, regarded as a real Idea, therefore this very inadequateness for that Idea in our faculty for estimating the magnitude of things of sense, excites in us the feeling of a supersensible faculty. And it is not the object of sense, but the use which the Judgment naturally makes of certain objects on behalf of this latter feeling, that is absolutely great; and in comparison every other use is small. Consequently it is the state of mind produced by a certain representation with which the reflective Judgment is occupied, and not the Object, that is to be called sublime.<sup>15</sup>

Where limitations are recognised by philosophical thinking cut in the Kantian mould, Brassier exceeds these limitations in assuming to know what might exist beyond the narrow confines of human existence (i.e. 'nothing', or a thorough going objectivity ). Brassier sees nothingness (as an extinction, which retroactively casts its termination of

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p50

<sup>15</sup> Adler J.M. *Ed.*, 1952, *Kant*, (The Collected Critiques), 1952, University of Chicago, p497

'being' onto the subject), and casts it upon the human, whereas the Kantian tradition merely sees what it cannot know; it sees nothing, because it cannot see anything, not because it purports to draw the limitations of existence at the limitations of human experience. It is this nothingness which casts upon the subject its semblance of being, and it is the subject's lack of an apparatus suitable for grasping the extent of nothingness which brings about the sublime feeling, in the subject. That sublime feeling, that helplessness in relation to the whole - objectivity, nothingness - the inadequacy in relation to an Idea, which *must be 'Ideal'*, for the subject cannot comprehend its nature objectively, arguably lends itself to a promotion and concretization of subjective being in its grasping at 'meaning' in 'life'. For it is the failing of the subject in comprehending nature which casts the subject as finite, delineated as the 'subject', by comparison with infinity.

It will be argued that Brassier's objectivity beckons a nihilism which misses the resistance of the subject even to the root of all nothingness, as a 'null' lacuna in the 'Shape of Nothingness', and within the wider reservoir of the 'root of all nothingness', which disarms nihilism with an open embrace. It can be conceded that 'nothing' exists, as the 'root of all nothingness', and indeed, that the subject is then cast as a meaningless thing amongst meaningless things, whilst still maintaining the sovereign privileged status of the subject as possessing a 'life' that 'lives' and as being the principle actor in discourse.

It will be further argued that an appropriated vision of Adorno's shudder could be that lacuna, but first it is necessary to disregard Brassier's extensive critique of Adorno's *DofE* via a prior consideration of neuroscience.

---Chemical Existence---

Brassier's critique of Adorno's *DofE* in *NU* emerges out of a consideration of neurological sciences that have as one fundamental basis the proven fact that thought is organic and chemically construed, and as such cannot be considered to be central to, or

constitutive of, existence. Such a point, made by Brassier with reference to the work of neurologists Paul Churchland and Thomas Metzinger barely needs introduction, being that the scientific consensus as to the chemical construction of thought and 'personality' is so well known as to be taken as a given by the mainstream. What Brassier attempts to do with this widely accepted notion - which leads him to later approach Adorno, for reasons that will become apparent - is to counter 'correlational' thought's resistance to this notion, saying of Post-Kantian philosophies that:

Despite their otherwise intractable differences, what all these philosophies share is a more or less profound hostility to the idea that the scientific image describes 'what there really is'; that it has an ontological purchase capable of undermining man's manifest self-conception as a person or intentional agent.<sup>16</sup>

What Brassier thus implies in the opening of *NU* is that philosophy should not be warranted a defence against science, and that the popular philosophical notion that, whilst science proves the origin of thought to be chemically construed, thought must stand as superior to science, for it is science that is dependent on the latter, is a feeble fallacy. What's more, the notion of 'belief', which might be evoked against this claim is further dismissed as dependent on chemical interactions which operate as a chain of causality within the individual no more controlled by that individual than causal interactions in the 'objective' realm. Here Brassier quotes neuro-philosopher Paul Churchland:

One's own introspective certainty that one's mind is the seat of beliefs and desires [or 'purposes' – RB] may be as badly misplaced as was the classical man's visual certainty that the star-flecked sphere of the heavens turns daily.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Brassier R. *Ibid.*, p7

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p9

An analogy is thus drawn between Kant's 'Copernican turn' in its relation to neuroscience, and Brassier's consideration of post-Kantian thought in its similitude to archaic and over hopeful religious systems of thought. Without going too far into the debate between a mind-centric existence, whereby the mind of the subject is a construct of cause and effect arising from logical deductions made on the part of the individual from day to day and an objective chemically construed existence whereby the subject is seen as a complex partitioning of computer like 'vectors' (*ala* Churchland) that feign personality insofar as personality favours the furtherance of the human species, it is necessary to treat of a notion of 'meaning', and moreover of a 'life' that 'lives', even where that 'life' may be seen as entirely objective.

If the fact that objectivity manifests as both a meaningless interaction within an expansive null-form (the Shape of Nothingness), bordered by a more oblique 'nothingness' which defies comprehension, *and* as reducible to the movement of electro-chemical impulses between vectors in the grey tissue of the brain could possibly be damning for nihilism, it is because it intervenes back at the basic level at which the subject could be said to tentatively exist. The subject that has resisted the fact of it being a peculiar variant of an object existent within a null realm can't be then simply undone by holding a mirror up to it, in order that it can see that at a fundamental level it is not the subject it purports to be, but merely a set of chemical impulses. For the holding up of that mirror admits of the fallacy in nullifying the subject on account of it being thought by the object, or of it being null due to its impending extinction, these both being arguments that Brassier employs. And whilst Brassier actually deployed these arguments in a different order than they are being addressed here (first the chemical basis of thought, then the Arche Fossil of Meillassoux, then the notion of the subject being thought by the object, *then* the impending end of the Universe) it remains that as soon as there is an attempt to discredit thought as it occurs in the day to day realm, there is an admission of there being a hierarchy of nullity. For there is, for example, nullity as such - nothing exists - and then

there is the nullity which points to the true conditions of thought in the subject as being chemically construed. Yet if nullity as such were absolute, the nullity issued by the fact of thought being chemical would be irrelevant. So it seems that there are competing bases for nihilism, which can only arguably find coherence as differing phenomena within the here proposed Shape of Nothingness, for otherwise there is an incoherence to nihilism, which cannot on its own account be self sustaining, for nihilism must, as explained in the opening of this chapter, once thought, be thought to its *nth* degree. Nothing.

A specific dismissal of the philosophical treatment of neuroscience is now warranted.

---The God Helmet---

Controversial neuroscientist Michael Persinger made his name for the utilisation of the 'God-Helmet', a device strapped to the heads of willing volunteers in order to stimulate magnetic fields in the brain that are said to induce 'God belief' (which is referred to here, for arguments sake, as the kind of experience precisely opposed to Brassier's project, not as an experience endorsed, particularly, over his project).<sup>18</sup> Persinger argues that such experiences can be induced through the manipulation of magnetic fields close to the brain, and that such activity, as it occurs naturally in frontal lobe epileptics, could be responsible, for example, for Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. Nothing here to worry a proponent of *SP* at first glance.

Though imagine that on one occasion a volunteer dons the 'God-Helmet' with the unusual result that rather than having any even mild 'spiritual' experience, she notes that she can 'taste strawberries'.<sup>19</sup> Now Persinger would argue - as he has done in many similar

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<sup>18</sup> For a full explication of these experiments see Persinger M., *Neuropsychological Bases of God Belief*, 1987, Praeger

<sup>19</sup> I thank artist and writer Paul Sakoilsky for this particular analogy.



instances - that this in itself does not exclude the possibility of strawberries existing: the fact that these experiences can be induced in this way (mimicking the effects of either religious experience, or of eating strawberries, or of olfactory or audio experience, etc) does not detract from the reality of these experience outside the laboratory, and neither, arguably, does the fact that these experiences can be traced to corresponding chemical processes inside the science lab. Similarly, Persinger remains open minded with regard to God-belief, providing us with this useful anecdote: Richard Dawkins, the avowed 'Evangelical Atheist' [his own term] and Author of the best-selling 'The God Delusion' , once donned the God-Helmet in an open challenge to Persinger (under Persinger's clinical conditions and supervision) to find that he experienced nothing in any way different to his normal mental state, other than a mild dizziness. Persinger later countered that Dawkins had scored extremely low on a standard pre-test examination paper designed to test a volunteers intrinsic capability to have 'religious', or analogous, experiences. In relation to the vectors in Dawkins' brain, and the chemicals that run between them, giving for Churchland the true locii of experience, we could argue that they were simply not attuned to having religious (or analogous) experiences. Something which doesn't in itself disprove God's existence.<sup>20</sup>

Again, it is not the intention here to defend God-belief, but rather to point up the discrepancy between two schools of thought regarding the identification of chemical impulses in the brain that correlate to experience: Where Churchland and Metzinger construe their findings as implying that life can have meaning, but only as inscribed within, and played out by, chemical processes - a meaning devoid of any influence from a God-Being, and indeed from an innate universal will to good, the latter being ascribable to evolutionary opportunism and necessity, rather than to any overriding moral current - Persinger takes these chemical impulses as primarily proof only of their own (the 'impulses') existence, and not to the detriment of the wider non-scientific narratives

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<sup>20</sup> See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/3306312/Holy-visions-elude-scientists.html>  
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initiated and supported by such experiences.

Now, Persinger, Metzinger and Churchland all fall ultimately on the same side of the fence, as it must be considered beyond the remit of any of them to ascertain whether God does actually exist. All they can do is monitor consistent activities inside the human body and mind, so as to give the human being a better understanding of its own composition. Churchland and Metzinger's findings are instrumental in the downfall of Folk Psychology - any form of theory that places the human mind as the primary actor in existence, in the wake of Kant's Copernican Turn. Yet, a look to Persinger could leave one more wary of jumping to conclusions re; the existence of absolutes, and therefore of our importance within the wider Universe. At the least, this examination of Persinger points to the uncouthness with which *SP* pursues its ends, as 'Evangelical' in its objectivity.<sup>21</sup>

For, with regard to Persinger it might be fitting to say that, if it were discovered that a given part of the brain - *x* - were responsible for the human - Folk Psychological, or Kantian - belief that the subject is the centre of experience, that '*x*' would not render that 'belief' as nonsensical in reality.

This is starkly different to the view of Metzinger and Churchland, who may concede that

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<sup>21</sup> Though Meillassoux would concede that there could be a future God, in keeping with his thorough-going contingency (whereby nothing is impossible, save for the overturning of this very notion that nothing is impossible) yet such an all pervasive contingency ultimately robs the subject of any consistent 'meaning' (or 'life') *per se*, and, in fact, opens up an ethical chasm, for which even the possible existence of a future judgmental God cannot account: if it is uncertain whether God exists, and whether if he exists he can really be called a 'God', life itself takes on a twisted and carnivalesque complexion: The possibility of their being a deceitful and unworthy God, a sickening uncertainty, could only imbue man with an ontological insecurity so deep as to practicably justify moral panic, and indeed, an amoral slide into a base universal horror, as if that wasn't already the case. Meillassoux's God, possibly coming into being at some future point, cannot solve the moral dilemma evoked by his own absolute contingency; it merely redoubles the ethical abyss that it brings about. For Meillassoux, contingency is the only absolute, and such a statement can have no saving ethical grace, a factor which endangers 'life', so far as it is here, in this study, to be understood. Of course, he perhaps deserves no more vitriol on an ethical basis than Brassier, yet Brassier is innocent at least of trying to secret in a poor ethical system through the back door. It is perhaps the cowardliness of such stance which rankles most. This will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

such belief is not rendered as nonsensical as such, but that it has sense merely as a belief that *is materially construed*.

This distinction, between the materially construed that issues its own insignificance in the wider World, and the materially construed that merely points up an underlying mechanism, and then leaves one still wondering as to the real state of things marks the two trends that one is presented with when approaching the question of 'life' and of 'meaning' via neuro-philosophy, trends that are not sufficiently exhausted, it is contended here, in Brassier's *NU*.

It is on the basis of the two possibilities here identified that one could argue that 'meaning' cannot be said, with any degree of certainty, to exist as anything other than a cipher - the false interpretation of meaning, the 'mimesis' of a 'life' 'lived'; a point made clearly by Brassier in Chapter Two of *NU*: The whole of human existence, says Brassier, turns out to be 'but a fly's waking nightmare'!

In the case of the above interpretation of Persinger's mind science one is still left with no indication as to there being an objective exterior 'meaning' to life - as bestowed by God, for example - but the issue is left wide open. Such 'meaning' is possible, though without any possibility of certainty; for without being able to step outside the human mind, we have no grounds to think 'meaning' as 'real', a point which rebounds again upon Kant's principle motive for restricting the philosophical domain to the mind of the subject.

So, in this sense, one can see how it is possible to mount a defence of 'meaning' - as meaning of an irrevocable order and not merely as the feigned meaning of the subjective mind, which Brassier does recognise - against Brassier's project. Though it is here preferable to argue for a notion of 'life', and at that 'a life that lives', rather than to talk about 'meaning', the latter term falling prey all too easily to a hopeless generality. A 'life' that 'lives' is one that can be construed as something other than 'merely' objective in its

complexion, even if it is in reality *objective in its complexion* (this notion will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter Two).

For Adorno, it is the subject's realization of its concatenation within the object that awakens in the subject its 'life' in contrast to the object's 'death', a phenomenon which simultaneously arises and subsides in the moment of shudder. It was Adorno's explicit intention to question the objectifying role of rationality inasmuch as the latter may cause the object to eclipse the subject. Adorno did, however, credit rationality with having the capacity to free people from their blind subservience to the cultic-object, if not their linkedness with nature, which it seems folly to try and extricate the subject from. Where Adorno may seem over 'hopeful', it is due perhaps to his apparent construal of a hope that is resistant to the base objectivity of the subject. It is as if, in terms of neuroscience, one could argue that yes, the human mind is objectively formed and sustained, but that its knowledge of that objective basis - i.e. as a kind of 'gnosis' - elevates the subject above the realm of object. Yet it has been here demonstrated that this would be a crass interpretation of Adorno, missing out on his essential negativity. If any hope resides for the subject in its difference from the wider object, it is a hope that acknowledges simultaneously the subject's similitude to the object. It could be argued, in an appropriation of Adorno's thought that 'hope', coming to the subject via the shudder, in face of the artwork - though, as will become clear in Chapters Two and Three, more correctly in the face of 'Art' - is a chemical construct of the human brain as object, which meets the external natural object, within the 'Shape of Nothingness'. Yet hope can never be *merely* chemical, for it is precisely hope's nature to signal the subject's difference from the object (its life in the midst of death), and it is the subject's knowledge of its objectivity which issues this possibility: The awareness of the subject's similitude to the object is the hope of its otherness from it, and therein is contained 'life'.

To understand what is untenable about this from the view of Brassier's rationalist nihilism, the latter's critique of Adorno need be addressed now.

---Brassier and Adorno---

Brassier turns to Adorno as a foil to his own theory, holding up the latter, along with *DofE* co-writer Horkheimer, as a staunch adherent of 'correlationism'. Brassier's critique centres upon the employment of the terms 'mimicry' and 'mimesis' by Adorno and Horkheimer in *DofE*, the former term indicative of 'blind conformity to nature', the latter as mimetic behaviour enacted by 'instrumental reason', which, according to Brassier, 'fatally repeats its own submission to nature. It has to mimic death in order to stave it off.'

<sup>22</sup>Taking this dialectical account Brassier attempts to argue for the inherent non-dialectical outcome of the process of mimicry meeting with mimesis, as a death of the subject by the object, drawn along one pole of the dialectic, 'mimesis may have distinguished itself from mimicry, but mimicry does not distinguish itself from mimesis.' Such a 'non-dialectical' reversal anticipates Brassier's later argument - here already discussed - , which utilises Laruelle's 'determination-in-the-last-instance' in order to construe of existence on a flat non-dialectical plane. Despite its merits, what is problematic in Brassier's account may now reside in his ability to critique the mechanism at play within the 'Shape of Nothingness' whereby the subject seemingly falsifies its existence despite its nullity, as one facet of the nature of nothingness.

How, at the level of what we know and experience as subjects that are objectively construed and who experience life as an ambiguous interplay between subject and object might the notion of 'life' 'living' be disregarded?

Principally, Brassier argues, on account of '*thanatosis*', an element which challenges the reflexive dialectical capacity of Adorno's system, whereby mimesis overcomes mimicry

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<sup>22</sup> Brassier R., *Ibid.*, p34

via rationality's realisation of its entwinement within the latter and thought's subsequent attempt at extricating itself from both the dominance of nature and the identificatory auspices of rationality as 'second nature'.

Brassier takes the reader on an intelligible yet pedestrian journey through Adorno's thought as laid out in *DofE* which will not be recounted here in full as its central themes will be laid out in Chapter Two, as an Adornian counter-argument to nihilism is posited. For now, the point at which Brassier's analysis becomes firmly his own 'critique' is where the notion of correlationism is introduced in relation to Adorno. To quote the former:

[Brassier quoting Adorno and Horkheimer] ... 'What threatens the prevailing praxis and its inescapable alternatives is not nature, with which that praxis coincides, but the remembrance of nature'. Such remembrance would aim at inaugurating a 'second nature': a nature mediated by human history and reinvested with the full apparel of human socio-cultural significance. Second nature would be nature reflexively incorporated and internally memorized – or, in the words of Jay Bernstein, 'the nature whose appearing to us is conditioned by our belonging to it.'<sup>23</sup>

Identifying that the 'the living/non-living distinction is the fundamental one' (quoting from Bernstein) for Adorno, Brassier reinstates his criticism of Adorno's thought as bearing a quasi-mystical element, concluding that its sentimentalism, in its desire that rationality casts reflection on itself and upon the memory of ancestral pre-reified existence entails a simple faith in *the way things were* that in fact has as its back up in nothing more than its own forecast of a retrospective imposition of the way things might better be:

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<sup>23</sup> Brassier R. *Ibid.*, p40

Reflection provides the sole criterion of authentication for the memory that we used to have more than we have now; and this memory is all that can substantiate the claim that we have been deprived of something. But *whose* memory is it? In light of the critical prohibition of absolute knowledge, and hence of the inaccessibility of absolute knowledge's self-commemoration, how are we to gauge the reliability of Adorno and Horkheimer's speculative remembrance of human history? Dialectical commemoration should never be taken on trust. The 'experience' whose attenuation Adorno and Horkheimer lament seems to have no other substance than the one which reflection retrospectively imparts to it.<sup>24</sup>

Yet Adorno's thought need not imply a hope of a future whereby the past (or indeed present, as past) is retroactively redeemed: The shudder, which Brassier undoubtedly would have missed in reading Jephcott's mistranslation of *DofE* (referenced in the bibliography to *NU*), opens up the subject to an experience of the object as untainted as that which would have been experienced prior to there having existed any element of domination by identificatory systems of thought (be they rational or pre-rational, as seen here in the introduction, and as will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two), *had there been* a time prior to identification. Whether any such point actually existed, or will exist as the past to a hoped-for future, is not relevant as the shudder actually marks the moment at which the subject realises it is *no longer* living as truly absorbed within the natural object, for the realisation of its not being merely an object, but, rather an *object that knows that it is an object*. This fact renders Brassier's critique of Adorno and Horkheimer - re; a nostalgia 'for an experience whose substance mirrors its own longing' fueled by 'the yearning for the mythic form of history *as* experience rather than for any specific or substantive historical experience' - highly ineffective. But it must be conceded, again, that this is so only if the shudder is fully understood and credited, for if it is, then second reflection upon the linkedness of man and nature is not a redemptive

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p42

act, but merely a condition of unmediated living. In relation to Brassier's following statement, one could argue that reconciliation and expectation are merely impulsive acts on the part of the subject that shudders:

Reconciliation and expectation are the theological guarantors of redeemed nature. But science *has* no concept of 'nature', and this is precisely what dissuades it from stipulating any limit between the natural and the extra-natural: nature is neither more nor less than the various discourses of physics, chemistry, biology, geology, ethology, cosmology ... The list remains necessarily open-ended.<sup>25</sup>

Then one might further argue that science *does* have a concept of nature, precisely *as* 'physics, chemistry, biology, geology, ethology, cosmology', and so on, and that it is the extrication of these elements from nature as a pervasive 'natural object' that threatens the subject with its own annihilation. Further, it is the subject's rare self-extrication from the the dual objectifying forces of nature and 'second nature' *as* Science - as the subject's introspective turn upon the natural object of which the subject is born - which Brassier sees to be an over wishful ploy aimed at the subject's hiding from objective reality, when, in fact, it is merely the annunciation by the subject of the realisation of its objectivity *vis-a-vis* both nature and science, as an instrument of nature: i.e. Science exists within the 'Shape of Nothingness' and to claim that it could cast its gaze outside is as arrogant as the apparent correlationist claim that nature is only ultimately knowable by the subject.

Yet even this dismissal of Brassier, which would allow for life to exist within a 'Shape of Nothingness' - such as has above been conceived of - could be countered taking an extreme nihilist argument, in line with Brassier's critique of *DofE*, in that this experience of life in the objective and dead realm of the 'Shape of Nothingness' is a kind of inverse thanatropic act, thanatosis - to remind the reader - being the means whereby an animal

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p42



fakes its own death in order to ward off death, which Brassier terms (borrowing from psychologist Roger Callois) psychasthenia – the condition that might have, say a schizophrenic patient feeling that they had lost their self and had been assimilated into 'space':

Ultimately, the pathology of instrumental rationality diagnosed by Adorno and Horkheimer would seem to be rooted in this psychasthenic dispossession by space, through which reason abjures the dimension of temporal transcendence which provided it with its capacity for reflexive commemoration. Reason becomes schizophrenic, and hence self-estranged, precisely insofar as it is evacuated of its temporal substance and rendered immanent to space.<sup>26</sup>

One can quite see that this tallies with Adorno and Horkheimer's reading of rationality as a reifying agent, with the subject ultimately being assimilated into the object following its identification as a series of material processes, yet it must be conceded that Brassier's conclusion turns, almost brilliantly, Adorno and Horkheimer's theory against itself:

Thus, if '[t]he reason that represses mimesis is not merely its opposite [but] is itself mimesis: of death' (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 44), this is because science's repression of mimesis not only mimes death, inorganic compulsion – it is death, the inorganic, that mimes reason. Mimesis is *of* death and *by* death. Life was only ever mimed by death; the animate a mask of the inanimate.<sup>27</sup>

Such an argument threatens everything hitherto established in this study with relation to Adorno's thought, and everything countered against Brassier, for what Brassier essentially achieves with this turnaround not only effectively imposes the object that is the 'Shape of Nothingness' over the mind of the subject, essentially objectifying thought

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p44

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p44

as a mimicry of nature, but, further, threatens that the 'Shape of Nothingness' which can be 'thought' by the 'object' be subsumed within the 'root of all nothingness', being that the subject as object which could otherwise resist total objectivity, however tentatively, as argued in Chapter One, now becomes an object that feigns subjectivity as a mimesis of the void feigning being: The 'root of all nothingness' fills the 'Shape of Nothingness' miming through the latter an animate aspect which does not in fact exist. Appropriating Plato's cave analogy - where reality as perceived by the subject is seen to be only the shadow of real events - even the players who cast these shadows upon the cave's wall become shadows, of nothing.

The subject's earlier resistance to Brassier's monistic system is now overcome. This overcoming is arguably achieved on account of the subject's mimicry of the object, which is then reversed and assimilated as the object's mimesis of death. Where Brassier's, argument that, again, "Mimesis is *of* death and *by* death. Life was only ever mimed by death; the animate a mask of the inanimate," may have presented no problem for the subject as its mimesis of subjectivity constitutes its very existence in the moment of 'shudder' - irrespective of the subject's base objectivity - this mimesis is now presented with a problem: Whilst it is one thing to feign subjectivity in a realm populated only by the object, and the subject-that-is-object, as phenomena colliding within the Shape of Nothingness, it is quite another when that feigning is the feigning of an alterity from nothing. It becomes no longer a question of feigning a difference from objectivity, but of feigning a difference *for* the object from absolute nullity (the unknowable 'root of all nothingness').

The principle hinge of this problem is identifiable in Brassier's reversal of life's mimesis of life as an animate death mask, which owes its dues to death, whereas - as will be argued in more depth in Chapter Two - the mask could be seen as animated by 'life' and existent on that count alone (death/the object being definable by its difference to life,

which is the realisation on the part of the alive subject of its inherent deadliness). What Brassier argues is that that whole charade is a mere constituent of death.

We are death, pretending to live.

---Tea and Antipathy---

Brassier's theory now resists the 'Undergraduate Hypothesis' in its mature form. That is to say, that the notion of nihilism being able to circumvent the paradox of the proclamation of nullity being made on its own behalf can be made sensible in light of the appropriation of Adorno's thought here made - the subject is 'alive' and 'dead' - whilst the saving grace of that argument 'we are alive' is reduced to a hopeless utterance of a thought that is filled with emptiness from without (or, more correctly, *from nowhere*). Brassier's reversal could, in fact, have the shudder reduced to a shudder of the object by the object, a notion quite in keeping with the irrepressible nature of nihilism.

One now encounters a problem in extricating the argument that 'life' can be said to 'live' from a wishful thinking on the part of the subject who deludes itself - or is deluded - that they are alive. Though the criticism put forward earlier, that Brassier appears to give unreasonable power to the bounds of human reason rebounds: To fill life with death assumes that we know the latter, and it then leaves nothing outside of 'death'. The philosophical subject, in direct contradistinction to what Brassier seeks to claim, fills death, in a philosophical sense, even if the latter has filled the former in an ontological sense.

Indeed, if there is a convenience underlying Kant's thought - regarding injunctions on the limits of thought - that is unbearable to some contemporary thinkers, there is indeed a convenience to Brassier's thought that might be equally unbearable, and that is the convenience of opposing to life a mere 'no life', whilst lacking the imagination to drive at

a world that might allow for the inherent ambiguity that 'existence' clearly does allow for, in appearing to exist at all (to be further discussed in Chapter Two). Brassier draws the boundaries of existence very narrowly, for he assumes a philosophical purview, even of the dead subject, over the 'root of all nothingness', that is, over any 'outside' - the outside suggested by the twin objectifying forces of time posterior and anterior to that which we inhabit - which might reflect upon our interior 'world' an existence (or, indeed, 'non-existence'), in further assuming to be able to counter death to life as a mere dualism of possibilities. Brassier has stripped thought and life of their significance, but opposes to life its mere opposite *for* thought - extinction.

Again, one is here returned to the base principle of Post-Kantian philosophy - i.e. philosophy must have bounds and those bounds must be set as the bounds of the philosopher subject. This is perhaps even more the case when that same philosophy reduces the subject to an object in an empirical sense in parallel with an arguable objectification of the subject on a societal level, for otherwise who is to say that the bounds are not incorrectly exceeded, with potentially detrimental results to philosophy and to society? The subject might ultimately be sacrificed to a form of thought that is fundamentally faulted in its principle intention, whilst an equivalent social tendency towards objectification will find its justification. Brassier promotes an objectification of the subject based on an urge to undo philosophy's limitations on the assumption that they are arrogant in their ascription of centrality to the subject, yet he then construes the subject as completely objective on the basis of categories of human thought which must on his own account be inadequate to the task of describing the essence of either subject or object. And whilst one may wish to compliment the intellectual rigour of Brassier's argument, it is unclear precisely what such a reductive system seeks to achieve aside from the promotion of truth in philosophy. Though surely this philosophizing must come about for 'someone'; a philosophical subject. Yet aside from some obtuse allusion to the re-entry of the subject as 'bound by extinction' at the end of *NU* - one assumes a kind of subject split between its subjectivity and objectivity and bound by the split - Brassier

does little to account for what is termed 'life' as it 'lives' in the subject. Where he does allow life a re-entry into his thought system, it appears to come crashing down under the incoherence that inheres between its separate parts:

For just as the phenomenon of death indexes an anomalous zone in the conceptual fabric of the manifest image – the point at which our everyday concepts and categories begin to break down, which is why it remains a privileged topic for philosophers exploring the outer limits of the manifest image – so, by the same token, the concept of extinction represents an aberration for the phenomenological discourse which sought to transcendentalize the infrastructure of the manifest image precisely in order to safeguard the latter from the incursions of positivism and naturalism. Yet it is precisely insofar as the concept of extinction expresses a dissonance resulting from the interference between the manifest and scientific images that it could not have been generated from within the latter; it is manufactured by deploying the manifest image's most sophisticated conceptual resources (in conjunction with elements of scientific discourse) against that image's own phenomenological self-understanding. At this particular historical juncture, philosophy should resist the temptation to install itself within one of the rival images, just as it should refuse the forced choice between the reactionary authoritarianism of manifest normativism, and the metaphysical conservatism of scientific naturalism. Rather, it should exploit the mobility that is one of the rare advantages of abstraction in order to shuttle back and forth between images, establishing conditions of transposition, rather than synthesis, between the speculative anomalies thrown up within the order of phenomenal manifestation, and the metaphysical quandaries generated by the sciences' challenge to the manifest order. In this regard, the concept of extinction is necessarily equivocal precisely insofar as it crystallizes the interference between the two discourses.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Brassier R. *Ibid.*, p231

Here Brassier points to the constitutive role of death in the subject's thinking of its 'self' as central to objective existence and as construed in terms of cause and affect, behavioural patterns arising from careful observation and intentional adaptation to phenomena (the 'manifest image'), before pointing to science's indebtedness to the manifest image for the *frisson* effected by the movement between manifest image and scientific image (as the carefully charted forecast of mankind's extinction), a point that has Brassier conceiving of what can only be seen as a distinctly Adornian-dialectical relationship between the manifest and scientific image (essentially, the 'subject' and the object', or, rather, the object thinking it is subject, and the object thinking that it is object) shuttling 'back and forth between images', no less than the subject of Adorno's shudder, shuttles between being the 'subject that is object' and the 'object that is mere object'. Brassier follows what is an extraordinary paragraph embedded in a discourse about Levinas, by arguing that the appeal of the latter to the trauma of death as constitutive of life, misses the absolute annihilation of the subject in the moment of trauma. Yet all of this serves to reinstate Brassier's main error, and that is his determination to credit everything to the account of the wholly negative; death, trauma, extinction, even where his own system keeps admitting of the re-entry of life, the subject, the manifest image as if it were a shard of light threatening to spoil an otherwise perfect blackness, that need be constantly extinguished, with curtains, with hands, with obfuscations, and eventually, by simply looking away.

Brassier's mistake here arguably resides in supposing there to be a philosophical method that can objectively eke out of scientific 'fact', a truth which resists the compromised position that philosophy inhabits in its indebtedness to subjectivity as it strives to be free from subjective fallacies. His final novel circumvention of the dialectic that keeps rearing in his thought, not least in the paragraph just quoted, is to conceive of the certainty of extinction as creating an excess of trauma so great that it fuels the philosophical subject into a binding of that extinction (riding on the back of Freud's theorem that the will to repetition of trauma aims at creating an excess of trauma sufficient to enough effect a

binding of that trauma for the subject, as if the subject needs to relive the trauma on a grand enough scale to be able to intervene in it so as to make it manageable):

Thus, if everything is dead already, this is not only because extinction disables those possibilities which were taken to be constitutive of life and existence, but also because the will to know is driven by the traumatic reality of extinction, and strives to become equal to the trauma of the in-itself whose trace it bears. In becoming equal to it, philosophy achieves a binding of extinction, through which the will to know is finally rendered commensurate with the in-itself. This binding coincides with the objectification of thinking understood as the adequation without correspondence between the objective reality of extinction and the subjective knowledge of the trauma to which it gives rise. It is this adequation that constitutes the truth of extinction. But to acknowledge this truth, the subject of philosophy must also recognize that he or she is already dead, and that philosophy is neither a medium of affirmation, nor a source of justification, but rather the organon of extinction.<sup>29</sup>

It is arguably symptomatic of the trouble Scientific Philosophy faces that Brassier ties the objectification of all thinking to a 'subject of philosophy'. One wishes Brassier would either tie his flag to the mast of utter nihilism, sell the philosophical farm and lead a monastic (under *sou rature*) existence - or, indeed, take up neuroscience properly - *or* proclaim the resilience of *life* and set up a secular gospel choir, of which - if he is to be believed - there would be no shortage of participants from the correlationist fraternity.

Though it would seem inappropriate to reinstate the philosophical sovereignty of the subject on account of the difficulty that philosophy has in representing objective truth, for that would be to argue that philosophy must always be inadequate to the task that scientific thought poses for it, and one must thank Brassier for stubbornly accepting the challenge put to the philosopher in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Yet reassessing how to make philosophy workable without crediting too much to either to 'subject' or 'object' would

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<sup>29</sup> Brassier R. *Ibid.*, p239

perhaps be a more worthy cause than that of simply eradicating the subject, in an unconvincing manner.

In order to tread this path further an argument will now be conceived and utilised, called the 'The knock at the door scenario':

Following upon the influence of television cop-shows there are few people who have not at some point come to fear the dreaded 'knock at the door'. The one that goes something like this:

>Knock

-answer

-Madam, I am afraid to have to tell you that \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name/family relationship) died today in an \_\_\_\_\_ (insert accident/disaster).

The ensuing scene involves the comforting but unemotional condolences offered by - as is usual - two police persons. This is followed by the condolences of nearby neighbours and family members in which tea is drunk and various lines are presented to the effect that the deceased is 'elsewhere', 'in a better place', 'watching over us'. And so on.

Now, no philosopher present at such a scene would be so cheap as to belittle such lines. Yet, held up to even cursory scrutiny, it is clear that these condolences would fail to satisfy any philosopher, save, perhaps, for one that had recently lost someone very close to them.

Only one line might meet with accord across various communities and persuasions of rational thought without appearing as irksome in a professional context: “\_\_\_\_\_ (insert name) will live on in our thoughts and actions, and in this way something of them will be kept alive.” This will be called the 'maximum-congruence condolence.' It's a fool proof cure-all that could upset neither an extreme atheist (i.e the stubborn kind who



cannot be moved even in times of extreme pressure to a fitful half-arsed prayer) nor a devout religious believer. It is a sentiment that could not very well be reasonably disagreed with, save if one were to delve into the true status of the subject re; being 'alive' or 'dead', as indicated so far in this study. In so doing one begins to conceive of a 'death' of the subject, through misadventure, that is already 'dead' (extinct), and one must then concede - though this is merely a digression accessory to the argument to be here laid out - that there is a difference between a dead subject which marks the passing of a distinct sentient being, and a dead subject which, in dying, merely brings about 'the knock at the door scenario' as one of many interactions between complex cellular organisms that inhabit a null reality.

In taking the 'maximum congruence condolence' and applying it to the nihilist disbelief in God (i.e. 'the death of God') and the extreme nihilist disregard for 'life' itself (the 'death of life') it can be clearly seen that whilst God may be said, philosophically, to exist only in the sense of 'living on in the minds of the living' (who are in any case 'dead'), 'life' itself presents a sturdier challenge to nihilism. Picture the following scenarios:

1.

>Knock

-answer

-Madam, I am afraid to to have to tell you that God died today in an \_\_\_\_\_ (insert accident/disaster). If it is any consolation Madam, God will continue to 'live' on in the minds of the 'living', and to inspire their actions.

2.

>Knock

-answer

-Madam, I am afraid to to have to tell you that 'life' is dead. It became loosely apparent in late 2007 on the publication of Nihil Unbound, and our suspicions were further entrenched when we investigated the 'science' and discovered that all human existence consists of mere chemical interactions deluding the 'living' subject into thinking it has a 'life' whilst it actually exists as an inestate organism on the surface of a wider 'Shape of Nothingness', which is itself embedded within a wider 'root of all nothingness', which casts its absolute nullity as a damper to the impotent interactions which mark the surface of the 'Shape of all Nothingness' . Though if it is any consolation Madam, 'life' will continue to 'live' on in the minds of the those that delude themselves that they are 'living', and to inspire their actions.

What is problematic here for nihilist philosophy is that 'life' is cast back within the confines of the 'Shape of Nothingness', being forced from within to accept its death, yet is found immediately resistant to it on account of its ability to conceive in any case of its life continuing in the 'minds of those that are living'; i.e. the 'subject' will continue to think itself as living, if only *in thought* - the vehicle of philosophy.

We could complicate this further by admixing the scenario last proposed with the one first out forward:

3.

>Knock

-answer

-Madam, I am afraid to to have to tell you that 'life' is dead. It became loosely apparent in late 2007 on the publication of Nihil Unbound, and our suspicions were further entrenched when we discovered that all human existence consists of mere chemical

interactions deluding the 'living' subject into thinking it has a 'life' whilst it exists as an inestate organism on the surface of a wider 'Shape of Nothingness', which is itself embedded within a wider 'root of all nothingness', which casts its absolute nullity as a damper to the impotent yet convincing interactions which mark the surface of the 'Shape of all Nothingness' . Though if it is any consolation Madam, 'life' will continue to 'live' on in the minds of the those who delude themselves that they are 'living'. Though I must also tell you, on a perhaps more critical note, *that your son died today in a motorcycling accident.*

Here we see nihilism's message being delivered, but then reduced in its enormity by the banality of the message of the death of a subject within the realm of the 'Shape of Nothingness' (the motorcycling accident). Suddenly, the proclamation of the death of life becomes secondary to the fact of life's living and dying on the level that one colloquially understands it to. This last scenario points to the resistance of life to death, and that very resistance resides in the fact of death's existence as an interruption of the plane of 'life' that the subject which is mimicked by death inhabits. Perhaps the crucial factor here is that when life is mimicked by death, as Brassier argues, it is only a mimicry, and not the real thing. That is, it is not life inhabiting death, it is life pretending to inhabit death, in the sense that it is death's inevitability that gives life its urgency and its sense of 'reality' even as a mere thought in the mind of the subject. In any case the above scenario radically shifts the boundaries of the argument held thus far, as an extreme form of subjectivity , a subjectivity of a second order - that, is, one operative under the aegis of the object, as the subject that is object - is instituted. Against an extreme nihilist form of *SP* - such perhaps that doesn't even exist but which must be erected here, so that any ensuing subjective philosophy can be shown to resist nihilism in its most extreme form, i.e. 'arguing to the extremes' - construed here as too objective, there is now an objective-subjectivity, in which the subject, which is aware of its being feigned by the object ('death'), in any case construes itself as 'alive' in thought, as opposed to 'dead' in thought (i.e. in the sense that one may think one's grandparents or first pet to be 'dead').

Arguably then, the path to an emancipation of philosophy from the subject need not entail an eradication of the subject.

It is unclear just how resistant to such a notion Brassier's thought as laid out in *NU* is, given the incoherence of its claims as pointed out above, though Brassier's mysterious about-face as indicated intermittently towards the end of *NU* is nowhere clearer than here:

The cancellation of sense, purpose, and possibility, marks the point at which the 'horror' concomitant with the impossibility of either being or not-being becomes intelligible. Thus, if everything is dead already, this is not only because extinction disables those possibilities which were taken to be constitutive of life and existence, but also because the will to know is driven by the traumatic reality of extinction, and strives to become equal to the trauma of the in-itself whose trace it bears. In becoming equal to it, philosophy achieves a binding of extinction, through which the will to know is finally rendered commensurate with the in-itself.<sup>30</sup>

Here Brassier utilises the inevitability of death as the spur of philosophy, suggesting that it is death that sets life free in order that philosophy might then be thought. If this is a performative notion within Brassier's thought, then from the purview of this study Brassier's main mistake resides in his critique of Adorno missing what in Adorno's thought, so resembles his own, as can be seen in Chapter Two. However, one cannot give over to this last of Brassier's notions more consideration than he himself gave to it, as an after thought conceptually underdeveloped in comparison to the rest of *Nihil Unbound*. There is certainly nothing to suggest that Brassier might renege on the ostensibly thoroughgoing objectivity of his thought, and it is with regards to that objectivity that the attention of this study must remain fixed. For it is in relation to two objective calamities that Brassier underpins his thought - the first being the proof of the objective existence of

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp239-240

objects prior to the existence of man, the second the proof of the demise of the Universe '... roughly one trillion, trillion, trillion ( $10^{1728}$ ) years from now'.<sup>31</sup> Yet it is not the effect of these calamities on the possibility of the subject 'living' - in regard to the overarching objectivity they present - that is of interest to this study, for the possibilities in regard to the relative merits of objectivity vs. subjectivity have been fairly well exhausted thus far. It is, rather, the viability of the objective (dead) subject in its capability of perceiving itself as alive that is indirectly challenged by Meillassoux's 'Arche Fossil' (the fossil record of the existence of phenomena prior to the existence of molecular beings). For if the subject is to, even on some falsified and 'ambiguous' level, live on in its mind, in spite of its 'death' - re; the 'knock at the door scenario' - it has to in some sense pin its thought to something other than thought (as subject thinking object *or* as object thinking object); lest life be otherwise considered as an entirely subjective ruse. Yet to pin thought to something that is entirely objective would merely reinstate the objectivity of the subject, hence the negative role that the 'root of all nothingness' plays for nihilism.

---Surpassing the 'Twin Objectifiers'---

In relation to the twin-objectifying phenomena of the Arche Fossil (signaling an existence prior to life in the universe) and the projected end of the Universe, Brassier argues that:

The claim that these statements are philosophically enigmatic has nothing to do with qualms about the methods of measurement involved, or with issues of empirical accuracy, or any other misgivings about scientific methodology. They are enigmatic because of the startling philosophical implications harboured by their literal meaning.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p228. That is '10, to the power of 1728 years.'

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p50

For Brassier, and Meillassoux prior to him, the Post-Kantian - or the 'correlationist' - for their belief on the dependence of the object on the mind of the subject, cannot countenance the Arche Fossil as something outside the parameter's of subjective thought, even where the correlationist in question, be they Heideggerean or Deleuzian, Adornian, etc., acknowledges the essential purpose of the object:

[...] the Arche Fossil presents a quandary for the correlationist. For how is the correlationist to make sense of science's ancestral claims? Correlationism insists that there can be no cognizable reality independently of our relation to reality; no phenomena without some transcendental operator – such as life or consciousness or *Dasein* – generating the conditions of manifestation through which phenomena manifest themselves. In the absence of this originary relation and these transcendental conditions of manifestation, nothing can be manifest, apprehended, thought or known. Thus, the correlationist will continue, not even the phenomena described by the sciences are possible independently of the relation through which phenomena become manifest.<sup>33</sup>

Brassier presents here a kind of mean-spirited and caricatured portrayal of the correlationist which could find anyone opposed to the latter's thought. At the same time, no attempt is made to think through the possibility of a correlationism that could countenance the actual independence of the phenomena that the Arche Fossil indexes.

Brassier continues:

Thus we can say that the real things of past time are given in the transcendental object of experience; but they are objects for me and real in past time only in so far as I represent to myself (either by the light of history or by the guiding clues of a series of

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p51

causes and effects) that a regressive series of possible perceptions in accordance with empirical laws, in a word, that the course of the world, conducts us to a past time-series as the condition of the present time – a series which, however, can be represented as actual not in itself but only in the connection of a possible experience. Accordingly, all events which have taken place in the immense periods that have preceded my own existence really mean nothing but the possibility of extending the chain of experience from the present perception back to the conditions which determine this perception in respect of time. <sup>34</sup>

In this respect the Arche Fossil would merely index an event connected to the perception of the Scientist who perceives it, linked backwards over time through a series of accumulative actions. Brassier argues against this notion:

For Kant, then, the ancestral time of the Arche Fossil cannot be represented as existing in itself but only as connected to a possible experience. But we cannot represent to ourselves any regressive series of possible perceptions in accordance with empirical laws capable of conducting us from our present perceptions to the ancestral time indexed by the Arche Fossil. It is strictly impossible to prolong the chain of experience from our contemporary perception of the radioactive isotope to the time of the accretion of the earth indexed by its radiation, because the totality of the temporal series coextensive with possible experience itself emerged out of that geological time wherein there simply was no perception. <sup>35</sup>

He concludes that:

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp51-52 (Brassier quoting Kant.)

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus it is precisely the necessity of an originary correlation, whether between knower and known, or *Sein* and *Dasein*, that science's ancestral statements flatly contradict.<sup>36</sup>

Brassier then reissues two arguments from Meillassoux against the correlationist regarding the significance of the Arche Fossil, both of which effectively amount to a simple refusal of the primacy of the subject in construing the object - something which, in actuality should meet with few opponents worthy of attention - , the Arche Fossil seeming particularly resistant to the notion of the primacy of mind in respect of its existence prior to the existence of mind. It is in the interest of this study to shelve all arguments that refute the independent existence of phenomena indexed by the Arche Fossil, so that a form of subject may be construed as 'alive' even in regard of the nihilistic truth which the Arche Fossil arguably imparts. In other words, it is here argued that the Post-Kantian would do well to desist from making any claim as to the dependence of the coming into being of the Arche Fossil upon the perceiving subject, or any excuses as to how the Arche Fossil may exist in spite of the subject (i.e. just as any other unperceived object might), whilst the *SP* practitioner would do equally well to not credit these defences with a response. The only true defence of subjectivity in the face of *SP* must be one which can live with the truth imparted by the Arche Fossil, albeit within a modified vision of existence.

Taking this into account, what is significant about Brassier's argument re; Kant is its failure to follow up on Kant's legacy, for it is arguable that Kant's aesthetic legacy - passing via Adorno, but also via the development of Art itself - provides for the defence of the subject in relation to *SP*, but that this has been missed by Brassier *et al.* for their lack of a critical awareness of philosophical aesthetics, and more particularly art theory and Art itself. For if, for the Scientistic Philosopher, philosophy ought to incorporate the tools of science, which, as the offspring of philosophy, has diverged from it yet added to

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Of course, 'Sein' and 'Dasein' are Heidegger's terms, but this statement can be taken in opposition to dualistic schemes generally - i.e. 'subject' and 'object'.



it, it is equally arguable that philosophy should pay heed to Art, which has built upon the former's promise in a way that is entirely unscientific, but which cannot, it will be demonstrated, be dismissed by science.

To digress briefly in elaborating this study's aims re; a return to a Post-Kantian aesthetics, as refracted via an Art-conceptual practice:

Arguably, what the Arche Fossil actually indicates is an aspect of the 'root of all nothingness', which only enters the 'Shape of Nothingness' upon the registering of the Arche Fossil by the scientist. Where Brassier (appropriating Meillassoux) has it that the Post Kantian argues the Arche Fossil to be incapable of existence without the subject (*i.e* the scientist) present to register its existence, he demonstrates that the proponent of *SP* believes that the nature of the Arche Fossil can be retroactively inscribed with a 'meaning' (*i.e.* the predominance of object over subject to the point of the latter's eradication), when, in fact, the Arche Fossil could be argued to belong to a 'nothingness' outside of the domain peopled by the subject (or by 'subjects'), thus demonstrating that 1) the root of all nothingness has a registrable form and yet 2) that form - communicated by, for example, radiation waves issuing from the start of the 'big bang' - says nothing of the experience of the 'big bang' itself or of what it 'means', that meaning only being conferred by the human subject in light of its limitations; this latter point being in line with the Kantian proscription on exceeding the bounds of reason in exceeding what can be known by the subject. Neither the Arche Fossil, nor the apparent fact of the Universe's demise some billions of years from now (for the same reason; such a scenario effectively presents an inverse Arche Fossil) can put paid to the subject in its preponderance over these 'events', given that their appearing to the subject is characterised by the subject's limited, yet nevertheless existent, apparatus of perception. Yet equally, the subject would do well to desist from applying judgments to the Arche Fossil - as if issued by '*it*' - in defence of one or other philosophy, for the reality that the Arche Fossil indexes can no

more be used to dismiss the importance of the subject to its being perceived - given its status as anterior to space-time - that it can be exemplified as an instance in which something appears for perception only on account of the fact that the scientific subject happened upon it. Both of these realities are peculiarly in thrall to a notion of cause and effect - what came first, the chicken or the egg? - which whilst being essential to the everyday temporal realm, is precisely what ought to be jettisoned when considering events that occurred outside space time, for they give the lie to 'cause and effect' itself. In this sense both Brassier and Meillassoux failed to grasp what is absolutely nihilising in regard to the Arche Fossil. Though this doesn't eradicate the subject *for philosophy*, as will be seen in Chapter Three.

The subject must be central to philosophy even where that philosophy concurs as to the existence of pre-subjective matter. Yet it still remains that the subject is no more than an object that 'thinks it is a subject', and which cannot be accorded any special status above the 'mere' object. Such a realisation threatens to reduce the subject to nothing but its material composition, rendering it ripe for manipulation and subjugation at the hands of the unknowing machinations of the runaway surveillance-meets-capital system envisaged in Chapter One. How does the subject survive the reality of a Universe that is reducible by scientists to its beginning and end? How does it survive the steady drip of the 'Shape of Nothingness' into the 'root of all nothingness' (as the extinction of the Universe), without resorting to the wishful thinking that large particle generators might bestow on the imaginative - 'Maybe we could colonise new Universes/Dimensions!'

On a philosophical level no amount of 'hoping' could shift the weight of the notion of the Universe's ultimate demise as heralded by Brassier some '... roughly one trillion, trillion, trillion years from now'

Imagine that demise was coming around tomorrow, and one gets a true idea of what this in any case means today for the subject, if not for the individual subject, who may get to play out their 'three score and ten' regardless.

To be sure, Brassier hints that our already being dead bestows upon us a responsibility - 'philosophy', in Brassier's final elusive statement of Nihil Unbound as 'the organon of extinction'. Yet what is the full reach of the subjective mind, in going beyond itself and beyond material reality? How might the shudder evoke life?

As has been argued with regard to the subject surpassing its societal objectification, such a shudder may need to be played out conceptually, the artwork needing to not exist in order that it might have any impact. Yet this is not to say that the concept cannot choose its object, but, rather, that what is 'Art' must inhere in the subject *which is object* (as thought), not in the object as mere object. Going on the notion (to be outlined in Chapter Two) that Art is that which 'shudders' and thereby gives 'life', one might wish to declare the 'root of all nothingness', in its two objectifying forms - the 'Arche Fossil' and the 'End of the Universe' - as 'Art', such that it no longer threatens the subject with its irremediable extinction. Nihil as an artistic Readymade.

Setting aside the seeming obscenity of this line of thought until the next two Chapters, one may recall that the principle difficulty this study has had in surmounting the absolute objectivity of the subject in order that the subject might be granted an independence such that a - in a sense, literally - 'mindless' onward march to objectivity be countered philosophically, on a factual rather than wishful grounds.

Now, despite Brassier's protestations regarding Post Kantianism, it is to Kant - albeit refracted via art-historical developments - that this study returns in assuming the possibility of the subject existing in and of itself, in spite of its objectivity, in that Kant, in his Third Critique, provided the grounds upon which the subject and the object can work together in the formation of an Ideal, i.e. 'Beauty'. Over time, the philosophical preoccupation with beauty has become one with 'Art' (as with Hegel, Heidegger, Adorno and, more recently, De Duve). It is Art, as a useless entity - inheriting from beauty a purposiveness without a purpose - which will be here utilised in defence of the subject.

In Chapters Two and Three the above mentioned obscene gesture will be given credence.

## Excursus

--- A Philological Note on Adorno's 'Shudder' ---

*Shudder*: **verb** to tremble or shake convulsively, especially as a result of fear or repugnance.

It is the purpose of this study in part to argue that 'shudder' (in its original form as the German *Schauer* or *Schauder*) is a term accorded a pivotal role in Adorno's work, operating as a central tool within both *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the first of his prominent works, co-written with Max Horkheimer and in *Aesthetic Theory*, his last, unfinished, work.<sup>37</sup>

That such a point has to be stated accords with the fact that *Schauer* has been so poorly translated - to the point of omission - in that first major work, *DofE*, by both of the translators who have attempted an English-language rendition: John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) and Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Indeed, for all of the faults that the latter translator identified in the work of the former, thus prompting his own translation, that regarding the omission of 'shudder' was not one of them.

The translation of '*Schauer*' as anything other than the near perfect English language shoe-in 'shudder' does two things that, arguably, have a negative impact upon the reading of Adorno in the English-speaking world: Firstly it renders every instance where Adorno

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<sup>37</sup> In each first mention of a text the full name is given. Thereafter an abbreviation is used, unless deemed unnecessary. *Aesthetic Theory*; *AT*. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; *DofE*. *Negative Dialectics*; *ND*. *Minima Moralia*; *MM*. *Nihil Unbound*; *NU*.

uses '*Schauer*' as a calculated explication of a specific experience with a theoretical import, as a mere communication of - respectively, in order of usage in Jepchott's translation of *DofE*, to use one example - 'horror', 'terror' 'dread', and so on, in the experience of the historical communities Adorno speculatively addresses. Adorno thus appearing to be a shrill and hysterical anthropologist, chronicler and harbinger of bad times, and one with little useful to offer in the way of interpretation regarding this 'horror', 'terror' or 'dread', aside from its connection to epochal systems of domination. Magic ritual, myth, religion and Enlightenment thought, systems which, Adorno argues, have all attempted to dominate and categorise nature and the human experience under identified predicates which in each case result in the systematic nullification of human 'life' itself. 'Life' being, for Adorno, that which specifically 'lives' in the subject; what makes a subject something other than an 'object'. Adorno's system is thus reduced, arguably, to a banal cataloguing of all that is, has been and will ever be wrong with society.

One could surmise that Cumming and Jepchott may both have felt *Schauer* to be a term overused in *DofE* and in that sense aesthetically uncouth, this seeming to them a reasonable justification for rendering the term differently each time that it appears in that text - their aesthetic valuations taking precedence over the possibility that the repeated usage of the term *Schauer* in the original German version somehow implied its theoretical significance.

They may otherwise have felt the term 'shudder'(in its English form) to be inadequate to the experience that Adorno attempts to describe, when that description was rendered in English, but this would have been to take a liberty, implying, as it does, that Adorno himself applied the wrong term when utilising the word '*Schauer*': if 'shudder' must be replaced in the English version with 'horror', for example, then, given that shudder and *Schauer* effectively carry the same meaning in their respective languages - as will be here

argued - the implication is that Adorno should have himself used the words *Horror*, *Angst* and *Entsetzen* or *Schrecken* (the respective German translations for 'horror', 'terror' and 'dread') in place of *Schauer* in his original text. This kind of translation by dint of personal taste - over and above the decision of the original author - goes so far as to have Cumming and Jephcott translating most instances where the term 'shudder' should rightfully appear as an English translation of *Schauer* wrongly, yet in different ways; so in the first upcoming quote from that text, the reader will see Cumming prefer 'terror' to 'shudder', and Jephcott prefer 'horror' to 'shudder', despite these differing English terms being essentially interchangeable in the context of that passage!

The decision to omit the term 'shudder' from *DofE* being made on whatever grounds, thus renders - as will shortly be seen - Adorno as having suggested that primeval man - and successive generations of men throughout history, suffered extreme fear, dread and horror, tinged with awe, in the face of nature, both in its raw form and refracted through various systems of control, apprehension, identification and subjugation, on myriad different counts and occasions, yet does not credit Adorno with having placed any particular significance upon this fear, save to say that it occurred - and occurs - at the hands of systems of control that are historically ever present, yet changing. It comes as no surprise, then, that Adorno's theory is popularly considered as overwhelmingly negative where it provides no political remedy to this negativity as such, and as overly positive in - the 'quasi-spiritual' sense - where Adorno appears to offer some kind of solace.

Secondly, the failure to correctly translate *Schauer* creates a diremption between *DofE* and *AT*, being that the latter, in its much more accomplished translation, by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), includes the sound translation of '*Schauder*' - a term with a meaning so far akin to '*Schauer*' as to render the terms effectively as one and the same - as 'shudder', again a sound Anglophone shoe-in, as perfect as could be found, given the perennial difficulties inherent in translation.

A brief diversion will be undertaken in demonstrating both the soundness of the translation of shudder for *Schauer*, and of *Schauer*'s similitude to *Schauder*, this being necessary in order to maintain the argument hitherto made regarding the centrality of the shudder across Adorno's works, before moving on to a critique of Adorno's thought itself: the interchangeability of *Schauer* and *Schauder*, both represented correctly in English by 'shudder' implies the ubiquity of that latter term as representative of a central theoretical notion within Adorno's framework.

*Schauer* and *Schauder* are both typically rendered in the following German phrases:

*'Ihr lief ein Schauer ueber den Ruecken'* – A shiver ran down her spine.

*'Mich überkommt ein Schauder'* – I get the creeps.<sup>38</sup>

Now, for ease of translation the most accurate English equivalent phrase has been used in each case, though, in fact 'A shudder ran down her spine', and 'It makes me shudder,' are arguably more adequate in rendering the central performative term in each phrase as close to the English equivalent as possible, whilst retaining Adorno's intention, as the English 'a shiver ran down my spine' may not only be used to denote a shooting feeling of 'coldness' as accordant with low temperature, but also a sense of nostalgia, and one that is not always negative - i.e. 'A shiver ran down my spine when I saw the footage replayed of Stuart Pearce's penalty against Germany in the 1996 European Cup Semi-Final.' In neither case is the sense of shock, fear and awe that Adorno applies when referencing the shudder inferred.

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<sup>38</sup> For issues surrounding translation I have to give thanks for initial guidance from Adeline Mannarini and Alex Duttman.



One may, to be fair, use the term 'a shiver ran down my spine' to describe a really bad experience - one operating in the register of the 'horrific' - but this is unlikely, the term certainly being applicable to horror, but chiefly in the face of 'horror's' high-camp tendency; think B-Movie's, as opposed to A-Bombs.

'I get the creeps' as an English term is most often used to refer to a feeling of unease that is not acute, but comes about, rather, as a sense of foreboding related to a fear that is distant, or that is in reality minor in its real threat, as in, 'Spider webs give me the creeps'. It is also used by young women to indicate a feeling of being ill at ease in the presence of men whose intentions appear to be dubious, but who have not acted on the intentions; i.e. 'He gives me the creeps'. Any real threat or manifested danger is likely to be described otherwise, and here 'shudder' may more likely be used, summing up, as it does, a physical effect of fear. A sort of closing on to a paralysis, that quickly re-opens and moves in this way repeatedly until calm has returned to the subject, usually relatively quickly.

In both cases, the 'shiver' and the 'creeps' are inadequate terms when it comes to describing what it is Adorno intends when citing both *Schauer* and *Schauder* as descriptive of an experience central to his thought.

What the term 'shudder' offers, is the possibility of drawing a congruence between the two German colloquial phrases cited above via their translation into their English equivalent. Shudder becomes a convenient - but moreover, accurate - term that we can apply across Adorno's oeuvre where he uses, repeatedly and with clear intent, the words *Schauer* or *Schauder*.

To be sure, the term 'shudder' has many applications, some of which may seem inappropriate for conveying Adorno's intentions. To give us some platform of

objectivity, the Oxford Pocket Dictionary of English, 2008, defines shudder as :  
shud•der / 'SHədər/ • v. [intr.] *(of a person) tremble convulsively, typically as a result of fear or repugnance: he shuddered with revulsion f.e | fig. I shudder to think of retirement. (esp. of a vehicle, machine, or building) shake or vibrate deeply: the train shuddered and edged forward. [usu. as adj.] (shuddering) (of a person's breathing) be unsteady, esp. as a result of emotional disturbance: he drew a deep, shuddering breath. • n. an act of shuddering: the elevator rose with a shudder | fig. the peso's devaluation sent shudders through the market. PHRASES: give someone the shudders inf. cause someone to feel repugnance or fear: it gives me the shudders to hear you use words like that.*<sup>39</sup>

Shudder appears in light of this definition to conjure up the kind of experience one who suffers from 'nerves' may feel; that very English and antiquated experience which preceded in medical understanding depression, nervous breakdown, anxiety and panic. Yet, it is also used commonly enough, in English, to describe feelings not nearly so troublesome or disruptive. One thing that may now strike us about the word shudder, even in the singular sense just described - as repugnant and fearful, a definition leaving little room for questioning - is that it covers a very wide range of experiences: It is possible in the morning to shudder at the cold (this being a usage that is interchangeable with 'shiver'), to shudder shortly after at the thought of waiting a further thirty minutes longer than intended for your commuter train, due perhaps to there being snow on the track, and in the evening to shudder as a hapless soon-to-be victim hears a stick break a little close to the forest encampment in yet another horror movie, viewed at the cinema after work ( a shudder as entertaining as fearful, but no less fearful for it), before later shuddering in the face of a threat from a knife wielding mugger after exiting the multiplex. Having somehow evaded the mugger, safely at home and exhausted you soon drift off. In and out of sleep, you catch the sound of a huge thunderstorm - a curious awareness of your mortality approaches you; you experience a final shudder, one perhaps more fearful than all of the others, though one hard to put your finger upon, a nervous

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O999-shudder.html> 27/12/2008

reaction, as earlier described, though one as natural as it is uncomfortable. Muted in comparison to the fear earlier felt in front of the would be assailant, yet somehow 'bigger', as an experience.

All of these experiences, despite their variance in degree, depend upon a 'repugnance' or 'revulsion' of sorts. Of these events, arguably two (the last two) most clearly evoke the sense of the word 'shudder' that Adorno himself implies, as will be seen (although it is at this point that such anecdotal evidence will be left aside), although perhaps all cited instances fundamentally imply a discomfort of the subject in face of what amounts to a threat that is exterior and which threatens to extinguish the subject itself, whether in an ontological or very physical sense. This then, running in contrast to the inappropriateness of the terms 'shiver' and 'chill' coupled with the close phonetic approximation of the words shudder, *Schauer* and *Schauder*, suffices to justify drawing an equivalence between the three terms. And although there may be nothing that might be seen as scientifically accurate in this justification, relying on the terms of the inexact discipline that translation by nature is, the case may be made here: Of all the proposed replacements of *Schauer* in Cummings' and Jepchott's respective translations of *DofE*, none seem particularly apt over its near-rhyming English equivalent, shudder, especially in light of the rendering of that term as a replacement for *Schauder*, - a term functionally akin to *Schauer* in that earlier work - in *AT*. That Jepchott's translation of *DofE* followed Hullot-Kentor's translation of *AT* might have in this sense dictated that the former follow the precedent set by the latter.

Now, to return to the point in hand; as a result of failings in the translation of *DofE* the opportunity for comparison - where that opportunity should rightfully exist in relation to shudder - across Adorno's works is lost to English speakers. This, arguably, does not only affect the English readers' enjoyment of these texts, but, given that they are so pivotal, means that one runs the risk of misinterpreting them, and with them of all of the

texts written and published by Adorno between their publication, including *Minima Moralia*, *The Philosophy of New Music* and *Negative Dialectics*, as these texts arise in the course of examining Adorno's theory.

Taking shudder as restored to its rightful place in *DofE*, *AT* provides a sound follow-up to assumptions made in that earlier volume, and indeed a sound rejoinder also to criticisms that could be leveled at the former. *DofE*, with the shudder correctly rendered, can also be read in such a way as to cast a light on some passages in *AT* which might otherwise bear an obscurantist bent, as will be seen. Without those corrections regarding shudder standing in place, these two books, along with the significant works that passed between their publication may be described as losing something fundamental to them as a body of work, even if they stand alone as texts convincingly enough: The reading of Adorno's entire career, and its relevance to us in the Anglophone world arguably fares poorly, for the mistranslation of this one term *Schauer/Schauder* in relation, at least, to certain specific issues that will be here discussed.

## Chapter Two

---Shudder to Think---

‘[...] this shock [Schrecken] is the moment at which the recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work; it is the moment of being shaken. The recipients lose their footing; the possibility of truth, embodied in the aesthetic image, becomes tangible. This immediacy, in the fullest sense, of relation to artworks is a function of mediation, of penetrating and encompassing experience; It takes shape in the fraction of an instant, and for this the whole of consciousness is required, not isolated stimuli and responses. The experience of art as that of its truth or untruth is more than subjective experience: It is the irruption of objectivity into subjective consciousness. The experience is mediated through subjectivity precisely at the point where the subjective reaction is most intense. [...] It [Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony] resonates like an overwhelming ‘Thus it is’. The Shudder [*Schauder*] is a response coloured by fear of the overwhelming. By its affirmation the music at the same time speaks its truth about untruth.’<sup>40</sup>

Brecht's question, as to whether there will be singing in the 'dark times', which famously met with the risposte, 'yes, there will be singing, *about the dark times*' does not, arguably, register the futility of song. Rather, it registers the stubborn insistence of life in the face of its impossibility.

One of the primary phenomena to be addressed here is Adorno's 'hope', a term often seen as wishful and at odds with the rigour demanded of rational thought since the dawn of the Enlightenment project, and for Brassier characterised as a regression to 'natural

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<sup>40</sup> Adorno T.W. *Aesthetic Theory*, Continuum, 1997, p244

theology'.<sup>41</sup> Contrary to this tendency, this study aims to demonstrate that hope can operate under the aegis of rationalism, even if that rationalism takes on the worst attributes assigned to it by Adorno and Horkheimer in *DofE* - i.e. *ratio* as the scientific tendency to subjugate and contain experience under inadequate predicates that develop a tyrannical impetus of their own, this being Adorno's description of the society we inhabited in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century:

Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings.<sup>42</sup>

It will be argued that the possibility of hope existing in the shadow of its opposite - an ossified and 'reified' rational society - is a central tenet of Adorno's philosophy, accounting for seeming inherent contradictions in his thought, contradictions that render a simple reading of '*Schauer*' as 'dread' or 'fear' wholly inadequate in terms of the dual qualities which Adorno attributes to the shudder, the Enlightenment Project and 'Late Capitalism'.<sup>43</sup>

As Simon Jarvis argues:

This domination of nature, however, is not a socially innocent resource. Adorno and Horkheimer take mastery over nature to be indissolubly entangled not only with mastery over human nature, the repression of impulse but also with mastery over other humans.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Brassier R. *Nihil Unbound*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p48

<sup>42</sup> Adorno T.W. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, 1997/Stanford University Press, 1992 p9/p6

<sup>43</sup> The use of the term 'Late Capitalism' (the "Late Capitalism" of Marxian thought) is prevalent in translations of Adorno's work and in Adornian critique. For that reason it is the term used in this study with regard to the economic system prevalent in Adorno's time and in ours, merely for the sake of continuity.

<sup>44</sup> Jarvis S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, 1998, p27

Following upon the claim - made in the above Excursus - that 'shudder' need be restored as a primary concern within *DofE*, both for the effect it bears on that work as the first major work in English language Adorno scholarship, and for its being a primary functional tool within Adorno's wider corpus, it could also be argued that it has the final say in Adorno's last unfinished work, *Aesthetic Theory*. This, not only as it enters some of the most luminous of passages throughout that work (such as that quoted at the beginning of this chapter), but also because, as it will be argued, it literally pervades the text as a functional form, even where the term itself is not mentioned. It also pays well to note that the shudder has the last word in Adorno's oeuvre in the English speaking world, intentionally or not (the text was unfinished at the time of Adorno's death), in the very real sense that it is a passage regarding the centrality of the shudder that literally concludes *Aesthetic Theory* in the *Excursus* of the edition most read in the English speaking world (certainly, if we disregard the draft introduction which actually concludes Hullot-Kentor's edition, but which cannot, arguably, be described as the last word in the text, being that it is a draft 'introduction', and is labelled as such): 'Life in the subject,' Adorno writes, 'is nothing but what shudders; the reaction to the total spell that transcends the spell.'<sup>45</sup>

Of course this fact of it being 'the last word' loses significance, if one do not realise the extent to which that same word pervaded in the first of Adorno's major works.

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<sup>45</sup> It is worth adding that that same sentence appears in what is literally the last paragraph in the original published German language edition of *AT*. 'Was später Subjektivität heißt, sich befreiend von der blinden Angst des Schauers, ist zugleich dessen eigene Entfaltung; nichts ist Leben am Subjekt, als daß es erschauert, Reaktion auf den totalen Bann, die ihn transzendiert.' Adorno. T.W. 1975, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main p490. Reference for the English version: Adorno T.W.1997, p331

The fact of *Aesthetic Theory* being unfinished as a work must be addressed here: It could indeed be argued that one is no position to say precisely what constitutes the last word for Adorno. However, if one were to disregard the draft introduction that concludes many versions of *Aesthetic Theory*, and to further to disregard the preceding Excursus *and* the section entitled *Paralopimena*, before that, one would in any case be left with 'Society' as the concluding chapter in Adorno's career, and *Society* is the single most 'shudder-laden' chapter written by Adorno over his entire oeuvre, both going on singular citations of the term 'shudder', and overall explications of its purpose.

The case could, further, rest with this last quote as to why this study approaches the shudder specifically when assessing the worth of Adorno's theoretical strategy for contemporary life - the shudder is constitutive of life itself for the individual subject (what is experienced as 'life' by the subject is 'nothing but what shudders'), under the conditions which Adorno considers 'life' - a term which will be discussed in more depth shortly - and it is something managed, by dint of what shuddering *is* ('managed by fear of the overwhelming'), in the shadow of life's fragility: 'Shudder [*Schauder*], radically opposed to the conventional idea of experience [*Erlebnis*], provides no particular satisfaction for the I; it bears no similarity to desire. Rather it is a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude.'<sup>46</sup>

Shudder is in this sense a theoretical tool, but also a phenomenon under which life may be said to exist, to pervade, even in the presence of a threat to it - the liquidation of the 'I'. Taking these two quotes together, the shudder not only allows for life to exist even where its quality may be said to be under threat (such as, conceivably, when the vitality of life is questioned under the auspices of a system which seemingly reduces every individual being to their capital worth), but it does so on account of a threat which issues a unique and valuable experience through the shaking of the individual, the 'I'.

It is on this basis that we could say that shudder precedes everything (both subject and object); if it is bought about for the subject in face of the artwork, it has also bought about the artwork, in that the artwork as such - as opposed to mere object - can only exist *for* the living subject: an artwork not thus apprehended could not be described as an artwork, it being a mere conglomerate of cells, still or in movement: like so much cotton duck admixed with oil, taking form only for the viewer 'alive' to perceive it as 'art', or a profusion of sound waves given shape only by sensory preceptors belonging to the living subject they meet.<sup>47</sup> Or, indeed, as a mere porcelain urinal, ready to be treated as such, yet which by some mundane provenance is declared to be 'Art', as with Duchamp's seminal

<sup>46</sup> Adorno T.W. *Ibid.*, p246



action, which will be discussed in Chapter Three, Adorno's own work being curiously silent regarding comment on conceptualism within the arts.

Clearly the human subject is accorded a special significance as a receptor of Art, over other existent bodies (over objects, as such), even in a completely reified society wherein the human subject is reduced in status to 'object'. Though it must be noted that it may be the artwork that designates the subject as beyond 'mere object', as much as it is the subject that denotes the artwork as beyond mere objectivity, a contradiction to which this study in part addresses itself as a necessary postulate for later findings.

The shudder experienced via the artwork is the mechanism that breathes life into the subject, on account of the object's presence, yet is also the mechanism by which the Art object comes into being, as not just a 'mere' commodity amongst commodities, flogging its wares for the capital gain of its owner and perfectly designed for this purpose - the market having being stratified, along with the individual subjects that comprise it, in order to assure maximum profit - but an object over and above the normal realm of object-hood; that which Adorno terms the 'absolute commodity':

*[In reference to Baudelaire]* The power of his work is that it syncopates the overwhelming objectivity of the commodity character - which wipes out any human trace - with the objectivity of the work in itself, anterior to the living subject: The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity. The modern artwork pays tribute to this in the vestige of the abstract in its concept. If in monopoly capitalism it is primarily exchange value, not use value, that is consumed, in the modern artwork it

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<sup>47</sup> 'Art' appears both capitalised and not (as 'art' – small 'a') throughout this chapter and study, with 'Art' signaling a universal value with the potential to evoke shudder and 'art' signaling the questioning of that potential or the indication that an artwork may not be deemed able to convey this quality. It is hoped that this method allows for clarification rather than confusion. Principally this signals that 'Art' - as will be here construed - does not reside in everything that is termed 'art'.

is its abstractness, that irritating indeterminateness of what it is and to what purpose it has, that becomes a cipher of what the work is.<sup>48</sup>

The absolute commodity is therefore an object which in its mimesis of the commodity form, transcends the role of the banal commodity, so presenting a possibility for the evasion of commodification, even if, to digress briefly, that be on account of a 'hubristic' gesture - that of the absolute commodity feigning, through its abstraction, an otherness from the world and one that may be as futile in a society that is entirely commodified, as the proclamation 'My name is Nobody' might be when under interrogation in a hypothetical nation in whose language the phrase 'My name is Nobody' translates as 'I am bedding your mother'! 'My name is Nobody' being the riposte that Odysseus famously employed to evade the Cyclops, who, unable to name Odysseus, was unable to kill him.

The art-object, as 'absolute commodity' prepares a similar trick, declaring that it is not a commodity - it cannot be named - 'identified', or categorised and therefore remains free from a 'reified' society. The question, however, that has to be asked, and will later be addressed, is over whether such a statement on the part of the artwork may be mere bait for the prevailing system of identification and commodification? Does such prestidigitation make the artwork all the more alluring and/or more subject to the available systems of control than it may otherwise have been? This question has Adorno's thought in a quandary four decades after his passing: as with our hapless man under interrogation, the statement issued by the artwork as to its non-complicity with wider reified society presents itself as a provocation to the powers that be: Art's aloofness from society makes it all the more alluring. The 'free' artwork adorns the independent museum, competing with the adjoining gift shop for the attention of the passer by. In short, the artwork's attempt at evasion, what worked for Odysseus, what indeed arguably once worked for the artwork, is lost in translation across time, across eras. Much of what

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p21

stood for novelty in the 1960s, and in the decades that followed, finds itself eminently consumable today.<sup>49</sup>

Adorno's thought is now applied to a state under which the language of commerce, of an object's being in the world and its reception, the process of 'identification' with which a subject apprehends the word around it, may have changed in degree so much as to make its evasion not even possible in conjecture.

It is perhaps this contradiction, returning to the mutual co-dependence of art-object and subject, each being defined by the other, that beckons forth some ulterior and higher power; one to which they both owe their provenance, in that they otherwise cannot essentially 'exist' as anything but meaningless objects with no recourse to an 'outer', 'higher', 'other' force. And it is this point that casts Adorno's theory as 'quasi-spiritual' or 'transcendental' and, indeed, this may be seen as a major failing within Adorno's works

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<sup>49</sup> We touch here upon an area here that has been widely covered by scholars of Adorno. The commodification of the artwork must either, going on Nick Smith's account (*When Hardcore Goes Soft* <http://clogic.eserver.org/4-2/smith.html>, 2002, page referenced, 12/10/2008) entail its inevitable subsumption within the Capitalist system, or, on Stewart Martin's account (*The Absolute Commodity Meets the Absolute Artwork*, *Radical Philosophy*, 146, Nov/Dec, 2007) entail the ongoing necessary link between the artwork, as absolute commodity, and Capitalism: 'If autonomous art is an immanent contradiction of the commodity form, it remains an inherent potential within a commodity culture. New forms of commodification need to be examined as the heteronomous scene of new formations of autonomous art; new forms of art need to be examined as the contradictions of new formations of commodification.' This much is conceded, yet Martin's conclusion reflexively reneges on what might, at a push, have stood for a radical philosophy: 'If autonomous art is an immanent contradiction of the commodity form, it remains an inherent potential within a commodity culture.' Yet, as it will be argued throughout this study, the fact that 'the absolute artwork meets the absolute commodity' (or, put simply, the free autonomous artwork operates by dint of the same mechanism that makes ice cream alluring) does not imply that a more thoroughgoing capitalism would open up the subject to yet more truth, as conveyed via 'Art'. Nick Smith's disdain with regards to the speed at which even extreme and novel forms of 'Noise' music became commodified in the 90s and Noughties is well placed, and points to the possibility that Adorno's formulation may not stand for all of time: there may be a lop-sided development to the artwork in its relation to Capitalism. Whilst the latter thrives the former is diminished in its critical capacity. Arguably, Adorno did not intend that artworks be justifications of Capitalism and its inherent contradictions (such that make make the existence of the autonomous artwork possible in the first place). As Ben Watson argues: 'Despite his pessimism about formal politics, Adorno understood that capitalism is creating the preconditions for freedoms undreamt of in antiquity. Hence his depressive mania: a new world is possible yet balked.' (*Philosophizingpost-punk*, [http://radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel\\_id=2187&editorial\\_id=18378](http://radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel_id=2187&editorial_id=18378), 02/08/2005). 'Yet balked', should stand as the obvious and operative element here - a freedom balked is not a freedom at all!

not least as this failing is shored up by some early passages regarding the shudder, both explicitly - where the term '*Schauer*' is employed - and in essence, that appear in *DofE* and which hint at the shudder's ability to return the subject to the lost experience of 'truth', a truth such as has not been felt since primordial man 'trembled' in awe at the power of unknown and unknowable 'nature'. The shudder then bears a kind of quasi-messianic status with the artwork being its messenger, pointing to a future salvation in a past exterior to the history of domination known to us in its various forms, from magic ritual through mythic thought to religion to Enlightenment.

An experience thus described, one that finds its salvation in a reflexive movement towards better times past, and one that exists on the grounds of pure speculation as to the thoughts of men that cannot be known, has unsurprisingly met with the criticism of its being - wittingly or not - entwined with the Judeo-Christian project, as in the words of Brassier, 'Adorno and Horkheimer's speculative Naturalism ends up reverting to natural theology.'<sup>50</sup> In this formula, we find a theory which places a future redemption in the experience of a bygone age (though for Brassier, more specifically, this accords with Adorno and Horkheimer's intrusion into the obvious natural order of time and space *per se*, as seen in Chapter One), and one which is known to exist only on the basis of unproven assumptions so deeply held about early man as to warrant being considered as a 'faith' in the ancestors, if not as a faith in 'God'.

And so, as if Adorno were a friend sick with psychosis convalescing in a neighbouring room, or even one that had simply '*got religion*', even the most ardent and appreciative follower of his thought may find themselves enunciating the following words with staccato like emphasis when confronted with certain points elaborated in both the *DofE* and *AT*: "But did he actually *say*, he believed that the shudder in the face of the modern artwork returned the subject to a truth experienced previously in the face of unfettered nature by primitive man?"

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<sup>50</sup> Brassier R. *Ibid.*, p48

Of course, the answer to this question would be that, in a nutshell, yes, he did say so, yet that this answer changes in complexion when the full register of facts regarding his texts are in place: Though Adorno's system of thought curiously appears to find solace in the small 'hope' open to the modern era in experiences he describes as primeval in complexion, to dismiss outright the seemingly 'quasi-spiritual' and backwards looking nature of Adorno's most forward looking intentions (i.e. his 'hope') without understanding the specific nature of his thought would be a folly, a point discussed with reference to Brassier in Chapter One.

For now, the following examination of the two most famed and commented upon periods of Adorno's work, whilst unearthing the shudder where it might otherwise appear to be absent, will also provide an opportunity to perform the first close textual examination of Adorno's wider theory necessary to this study, with a focus upon the significance of shudder in its relation to Adorno's 'hope' and the bearing it has on the possibility of 'life' existing in - and for - the 'subject' in a world that is arguably otherwise ossified and objectified by the mechanisms of rationality which pervade society in institutional form, from the media, to the education system, to the State apparatus, to the Late Capitalist business model. Each interest group performing from within their own field a pervasive attempt to stratify, categorise and 'identify' all aspects of contemporary life. The question then asked will be one over whether it might be possible now, as Adorno argued that it was in his time, for the artwork to elicit the shudder and thus enable the subject to 'think', fleetingly, aside from the closed confines of 'identity thinking', and indeed, if so, how?

To address the question opened, over 'hope' and Adorno's seemingly uncouth dalliance with what some would term the 'quasi-spiritual', it will ultimately be asked to what exterior force, if any, the shudder owes itself, being that it effects a coming into being of both the subject and object as something other than mere material 'reified' being, in a

world that by Adorno's admission consists of only reified material? Further, it will be asked, if it is not to a transcendent force (such as to a 'God', a benevolent natural force, a historical linearity bent towards a better world, a natural and common good in all beings) that the possibility of shudder is owed, how might that shudder exist under entirely material terms? This will then enable a conception of a system of thought under which the shudder might bestow 'hope' upon the life of the reified subject on grounds that can survive rationalist society, even on account of the tenet's held to be true by that 'rational' society regarding the 'merely' material matter of human beings, and the 'merely' chemically construed nature of human thought.

In undertaking this, it is enough to focus for now upon the significance of 'shudder' - the indexical point at which Adorno's hope for a better future, or, indeed, for a better present, is played out in the complex interactions that occur between subject and object under certain circumstances. The shudder, which has never been in Adorno's work so simple a device as its faint trace appears - in its absence through poor translation and replacement with inadequate 'like' terms - is a moment as seemingly contradictory as Adorno's wider system - of internal necessity - is: if there must be some higher 'force' or transcendent capacity that bestows in some circumstances an ability for the subject and object to cast upon one another some kind of 'meaning', some kind of 'otherness' thus enabling them to become something aside from the 'mere objects' that they both arguably in fact *are* - the subject itself being materially construed - it will here be argued that it is at the moment of shudder that such a force performs its feat - the sleight of hand that finds in base nihilism its opposite, and thus challenges the findings of Chapter One. It is the shudder itself that is the incriminating performative moment of 'quasi-spiritual transcendence', that renders the mere object as 'art', and renders the reified subject - as such, no more than an 'object' - as non-reified, as a possessing a 'life'.

Yet even Adorno's first reference to shudder, as '*Schauer*' in the original German version *DofE* creates problems in this regard - though indeed, problems that are good for Adorno, in that they explain away that curious spiritual aspect; Providing, of course, that that first reference is rendered with the most pertinent of factors residing in place- i.e. the 'shudder' itself:

[See here both English translations of the passage in question rendered, as will be the pattern where *DofE* is cited, for sake of balance, except in cases where this is deemed to be unnecessary].

What the primitive experiences as natural is not a spiritual substance in contradistinction to the material world but the complex concatenation of nature in contrast to its individual link. The cry of terror [*Schrecken*] called forth by the unfamiliar becomes its name. It fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known, permanently linking horror [*Schauer*] to holiness. The doubling of nature into appearance and essence, effect and force, made possible by myth no less than by science, springs from human fear, the expression of which becomes its explanation.<sup>51</sup> – *EJ*

What the primitive experiences in this regard is not a spiritual as opposed to a material substance, but the intricacy of the Natural in contrast to the individual. The gasp of surprise [*Schrecken*] which accompanies the experience of the unusual becomes its name. It fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known and therefore terror [*Schauer*] as sacredness. The dualization of nature as appearance and sequence, effort and power, which first makes possible both myth and science, originates in human fear the expression of which becomes its explanation.<sup>52</sup> - *JC*

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<sup>51</sup> Adorno T.W. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 2002, p10

<sup>52</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1997, p15

Now, to approach this passage about-face, it is necessary to first address the parallel that Adorno draws between myth and science towards its end, in order to address the inverse historical linearity with which Adorno seeks to redeem the contemporary subject in its experiencing the awe that primeval subjects long ago felt in face of nature, and the seeming uncouthness of this thought. That is, its seeming blithe similitude to Judaic Messianism; *i.e* the hope for a saviour who draws his own power from a time and space anterior to our own. This parallel is demonstrative of a key factor in Adorno's thinking, and that is the reciprocity with which Adorno treats of myth, together with its precedent and antecedent systems of thought - magical rite and religious ritual - and contemporary scientific thought as 'Myth becomes Enlightenment and Nature mere objectivity' (*EJ*) or 'Myth turns into Enlightenment and nature into mere objectivity' (*JC*). Thus, we see that the categorization of daily phenomena - and phenomena that exist on a micro and on a macro level - under scientific predicates has parallels with a similar process that operated under mythic, magic and religious thought, whereby human behaviour was encapsulated and identified through the telling of mythic tales, reflecting the lives of humans in the actions of the gods, which the subject was obliged to act out ever and again in its own life. The principle difference lays in the pervasiveness of Enlightened activity: 'An atom is smashed not as a representative but as a specimen of matter [...]' (*EJ*, p7) ; An atom is smashed not in representation but as a specimen of matter [...]' (*JC*, p10) Where in the ritual, one idol stood in for a real life phenomenon - a Sun god for the sun, for example - science reduces all things, for Adorno, to mere lifeless objectivity on the same terms, as if mere 'points' along a continuum of identified matter. The Sun has a numerical value, as do apples, trees, cars, artworks, shoes, domestic and wild animals and so on, infinitely.

That the shudder might return the subject to an experience of awe unfettered by Myth, Science, or any other epochal form of domination demonstrates that the shudder is an experience equal in any epoch, as it delivers the given subject from the full force of the dominating powers that, for Adorno, make up its experience regardless of the era that the



given subject lives in, as it doubles that subject's experience into 'appearance' and 'essence' and fixes 'the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known'. If one is to take this line, it might seem reasonable to follow with the argument that at any given point in history the subject that shudders - and is thus freed from the domination imposed on him by systems that 'identify' human experience - experiences itself as anterior to the system of societal domination within which it exists.

Now, going on the argument just laid out, we might then excuse Adorno for having his subject jump backwards in time - if not in actuality, in the sense that it experiences sensations open usually only to men whose lives long preceded its own - as that subject experiences the awe in the face of the shudder felt by its forebears, on the basis that the feeling of being free from domination in any period bears a similar complexion in terms of being one whereby 'subject' and 'object', 'appearance' and 'essence', 'effect' and 'force', are no longer separated out from one another on false terms as thought predicates but experience themselves as interconnected, as the tendency to 'identify' phenomena under inadequate and false predicates is suspended. In this sense, returning to experiencing the physiological effects felt by our ancestors is not such a bizarre idea. But, of course, if this were the point that Adorno makes when he suggests that the shudder returns us to a feeling of truth as felt commonly by primeval man, and less commonly in fleeting glimpses by our more recent ancestors ever since, it would be a fairly pedestrian one. Inconsequentially, Adorno would merely have pointed out that along with the reciprocity that inheres across different eras of domination there is a coincident commonality of experience felt by the subject and, therefore, the subject is not returned to the feeling felt by primeval man as such but is merely party to experiences similar to those of its forebears - for example, when they 'shuddered' in the face of natural weather phenomena. That some of those processes transcend a 'false' awareness of our separateness from objects means little here: in dreams one flies without the aid of machines, just as one can imagine that their ancestors did in dreams. Though the difference between the subject

today and its ancestors, perhaps, is that today's subject knows such flight to be impossible in waking reality, for its grasp on simple physical realities. Why then now give credit to a momentary effacement of the usual physical law that pertains between subject and object, in the moment of 'shudder'? Extreme physical stress sometimes induces the same effect - perhaps being a motivating factor behind pilgrimage - but it would be folly to argue that it offers hope to the subject, or that it offers a spiritual salvation, quasi-, semi-, or otherwise!

The fact of going backwards, to an age that is somehow 'purer' or more 'true' than that experienced by the contemporary subject thus only really becomes relevant - that is, of real interest - if that going backwards returns the subject to a time anterior to sequential time, anterior to 'history' as such and thereby the history of domination - the measurement of time and the recording of history being concomitant with man's subjugation and stratification of natural experience - as understood by the subject. In any case, if this were possible, and if this is what Adorno intended that the shudder bring about in the experiencing subject, the charge against Adorno's thought system of having an - at the least - 'quasi-spiritual' complexion could thus be bought again. To counter any such charge, one might turn in all fairness to the first sentence of the above cited passage:

What the primitive experiences as natural is not a spiritual substance in contradistinction to the material world but the complex concatenation of nature in contrast to its individual link.<sup>53</sup>

So the 'spiritual' itself, where credence is given to it, may be taken as materially inscribed, and it is with this point that we might defend the seemingly natural feat thus described by Adorno in *AT*: 'Under patient contemplation artworks begin to move. To

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<sup>53</sup> As earlier cited.

this extent they are truly afterimages of the primordial shudder [*Schauer*] in the age of reification: the terror of that age is recapitulated vis-à-vis reified objects.<sup>54</sup>

That artworks are afterimages of the primordial shudder does not mean that any 'auratic' or 'spiritual' essence of that shudder inheres in them, at least, none that cannot be attributed to its material composition - i.e. certain artists' materials derive from the ground over which our ancestors walked, materiality and its historical derivation of a given object being factors pertinent to the fetish commodity.

It is worth just halting here to address Jarvis' characterisation of the artwork and the way in which 'history' is said to be contained within the artwork:

The work of art knows the society that it lives off and on which it is irreducibly dependent, not by giving us a picture of that society but by assembling materials which are not themselves outside society and history but contain historical experiences sedimented within themselves.<sup>55</sup>

The shudder - a term actually overlooked by Jarvis - as a moment when this sedimented material springs forth, as '*truth*' could clearly be presented within a framework whereby Adorno's thought is cast as seeking after some future redemption; yet there seems something almost too contrived, too convenient in this notion, which returns us to a kind of quasi-messianic vision of the artwork as the future herald of ideals long past.

The trace of the ancestral that artworks possess is, rather, a trace borne in light of the artwork showing to the subject that which it cannot comprehend (and not a sedimented form of historical matter, as if dinosaurs could speak through oil paint): the shudder in the face of the truly new, truly incomprehensible artwork, returns man to the shudder in the

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<sup>54</sup> Adorno T.W. 1997, p79

<sup>55</sup> Jarvis S. *Ibid.*, p107

face of nature. The complex concatenation of nature is once again exposed to the subject, even though the artwork itself is at a remove from nature. To digress, briefly, here Marx's concern with the fetish meets the psychological effects of the perverse (i.e. 'the new'), and the debt to Marx must be recognized, if only insofar as it is the primary factor that might see Adorno's 'absolute commodity' (a term itself borrowed from Marx) not appear as a total capitulation of the artwork to commodification, but as a form that though complicit within commodification, is inherently at odds with it. If Adorno's artwork as absolute commodity be seen as a defence of the possibility of true 'Art' existing - even fleetingly - under free market conditions, such a notion must run up against the fact that Adorno would have had no need to erect this absolute commodity as opposed to a mere commodity, if the conditions of normal commodification were enough in themselves to realise true 'Art'; 'Art', as opposed to the 'culture industry' product being central to any 'hope' existing for Adorno in a Late Capitalist society. For Adorno:

The general designation 'culture' already contains, virtually, the process of identifying, cataloguing, and classifying which imports culture into the realm of administration.<sup>56</sup>  
(EJ)

Culture as a common denominator already contains in embryo that schematization and process of cataloguing and classification which brings culture within the sphere of administration.<sup>57</sup> (JC)

Hence, for Adorno, it is only the truly abstract and marginal work that can step outside this quandary for the artwork.

Of course, that the shudder felt in the face of the artwork has a correlate with the primordial shudder but on account only of that primordial 'shuddering' being itself

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<sup>56</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. 2002, p104

<sup>57</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. 1997, p131

completely materially inscribed is a point lost when making comparison between the passage from *AT* just quoted and that from *DofE* first quoted in its two English forms some paragraphs back if the term shudder (as *Schauer*) is not restored to that passage. This is all the more significant for the fact that the passage quoted from *AT* is that which draws the strongest thematic correlation between that text and *DofE* with regard to the shudder.

Now, to ascertain what is really at stake in the shudder's absence from that first passage we need look more closely to what it primarily achieves as a passage, a factor which resides in its elaboration upon shudder as the moment in which the subject realises its affinity with the natural object as a fearful event, one which, to be sure, entails that subject's loss of 'self': 'the complex concatenation of nature' stands in contrast to the subject's individual link within that chain. Here we see the explication of the subject's experience as he momentarily undergoes a polar shift in the perception of the position he occupies within nature, as a subject of nature, not as a subject for which nature is an object. The 'cry of terror [*Schrecken*]' thus issued forth by the subject, who has effectively lost its 'self', is the grounds upon which, for Adorno, spirituality is established for primeval man. That 'cry' is the naming of 'terror' which, for Adorno, permanently links 'shudder [*Schauer*] to holiness', implying that the holy, taken in a wide sense, in an epoch of magic ritual, myth or religion occurs as the foreclosure of the conditions of reality that have been temporarily exposed at the moment of terror for the subject. *Schrecken* is thus the moment of fearful realisation, the cry of fear, whilst *Schauer* is the mechanism by which that fear opens up onto truth - the understanding that the subject ascertains of its linkedness within nature's concatenation, rather than its existing as separate to that concatenation, but also the mechanism by which that truth is again closed, the cry of terror, shriek, or *Schrecken* being all that is needed in the way of identification in order for nature to be once more apprehended as a concatenation over which the subject presides. *Schrecken* is the naming by the subject of its linkedness with nature, a

naming that thus establishes the subject as separate from the object (nature), an act which in conjuncture is enough to delineate the subject from the object, even if at micro-level they can be scientifically said to be composed of the same base building blocks - atoms, neurons, protons, etc.

If one does not even register the appearance of shudder in that passage and, in fact, if one forgets all that has just passed, and lets it follow instead from the fact that terror (*Schrecken*) exposes the subject to the true conditions of its linkedness with nature, that the shriek, that cry of terror that issues from the realisation of truth permanently links 'horror to holiness' as Jepchott has it in his translation, 'terror as sacredness' as Cummings had it - instead of 'shudder to holiness' or 'shudder to sacredness' as one would better have it - one loses what might otherwise be taken, alongside the wider corpus of Adorno's works, to be key to throwing light on Adorno's project as a whole. Restoring the shudder to *DofE* differentiates it, rightfully, from *Schrecken*, principally because *Schauer* is the flipside to *Schrecken's* identificatory ruse in the latter's feigning of the subject's ability to construe nature at one remove from itself, as what Adorno would term 'second nature'.

Even laying aside a knowledge of Adorno's later works, the word 'shudder' evokes something very different for the English reader than horror: the shudder is a physical affect, but one in which the subject is active - a verb - a sort of opening up onto an experience, followed by a closure; a fear that subsides. Horror is a noun; one is subjected to horror, one does not enact it as a performative gesture. Even when horror is meted out by one man to another, horror is not *done* by one to another, as arguably it is a systematic effect linked to whatever mode of domination exists. At other times horror merely occurs as the subject falls foul of nature, caught in a storm, or subjected to natural disease, and so on. This is significant, as shudder is a very distinct phenomenon from horror or terror: shudder is the affect that follows upon what horror presents, and what horror presents for

Adorno in the formulation given above is the fact of the subject's linkedness to the object, to nature, to the possibility of that subject being an 'object', in essence its frailty and mortality. Here quite what comes first - the cry (*Schrecken*) or the shudder (*Schauer*) - is unclear, not through any failing ambiguity in Adorno's text as such, but rather in accordance with the ambiguity that the shudder itself presents. As stated in the previous paragraph, *Schrecken*, the naming of terror, is the subject's realisation of its difference from the object, as a simultaneous realisation of its complicity with the object occurs. The cry (*Schrecken*) itself is evoked from outwards, but undoubtedly takes place on the subject's account. It is the subject which cries that thus 'names terror' and evokes shudder as the realisation of the subject's complicity with the object. This complicity is some comfort - one cannot fear, as an outsider, that which they actually *are* - but is short lived for the fact that the subject, despite its concatenation within nature is still subject; therefore the cry must resume again.

As if that were not enough ambiguity, it must be noted that for the subject, a concatenation within nature is perhaps as fearful as nature's utter difference. It is the possibility of being engulfed within nature - the subject's loss of its 'self' - , of dying, which evokes a fear above all other fears. *Schrecken*, the naming of the object, by the subject, as 'other' to itself - this effecting *Schauer* - therefore carries an ulterior impulse, as the subject shudders in its similitude to the object. *Schrecken* and *Schauer* are therefore not an opening and closing upon each other, as if a process of *Schrecken-Schauer-Schrecken* or, equally, *Schauer-Schrecken-Schauer* were played out infinitely. What is then ultimately characterised by this process, as well as being inherent to this process, is the thoroughgoing ambiguity of the subject. Subject and object are equally parts of an ambiguous whole for which the subject is accorded a defining role.

Ultimately it is this ambiguity that differentiates subject from object, as whilst they both remain fundamentally objective in composition, there would be no 'life' to speak of

without the radical alterity of the subject, experienced in its witnessing, as shudder, the otherness of the object.

It must be noted, as a point that is curiously skimmed over in Adorno scholarship, that when Adorno talks of the terror of nature, he is not referring to the sheer fright associated with hailstorms, thunder, hurricanes, tornadoes, volcanoes, earthquakes, or even tsunami's, comets and imploding Universes: Rather, nature pervades from within, and it is that most worrisome natural affect - death - which threatens to turn the subject into an object in a very literal sense, death being what makes all of nature's other affects so fearsome.

It must also be noted, though in passing, as it is not the principle purpose of this study to interrogate the work of Jephcott and Cummings, that to use the terms 'horror' and 'terror' in this way, as applied, to the holy, to Myth, and by association to religion, is to draw a parallel between early systems of control, as Adorno sees them, and later systems of subjugation and coercion to which the terms 'horror' and 'terror' are applied, in English translation at least, within Adorno's work post WW2 - i.e. the horrors of the Nazi death camps, the terror of civilian murder for political or ideological gain. This is all the more the case for the fact that *DofE* itself carries a lengthy analysis of Anti-Semitism, in its last full chapter, *Elements of Anti-Semitism*, wherein the mechanism underlying the shudder is further described in its duality as both being linked with restrictive systems of governance (as a form of Second Nature) and as being critical of those systems:

Space is absolute alienation. Where the human seeks to resemble nature, at the same time it hardens itself against it. Protection as a petrified terror [*Schrecken*] is a form of camouflage. These numb human reactions are archaic patterns of self preservation: the tribute life plays for its continued existence is adaptation to death. (*EJ*)<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. 2002, p148



Space is absolute alienation, when men try to become like nature they harden themselves against it. Protection as fear [*Schrecken*] is a form of mimicry. The reflexes of stiffening and numbness in humans are archaic schemata of the urge to survive: by adaptation to death life pays the toll of its continued existence. (JC)<sup>59</sup>

Without a full understanding of the *Schrecken* and of Adorno's utilization of terms such as *Schauer* in their relation to that term, this quoted analysis - taken in the context of the wider chapter, which addresses societal subjugation as an outward projection of the fears of the 'privileged' few - does little to throw light upon horror, terror, dread, fright or indeed any other adverse emotional reaction to tyranny, aside from as a criticism of a particular - though far reaching in its negative impact - period of modern history. One sees that in a society devoid of sense, a virtual enactment of death offers the only opportunity to go on living. What is perhaps missed here is just what an opportunity the subject is then presented with; life's living, in spite even of death's dying.

Though one must be careful: A lack of a grasp of what's at stake when we consider 'shudder', *Schrecken's* flipside, has the effect here of dangerously conflating all forms of societal control, all forms of violence, and all forms of 'horror' as if fear in the face of a thunder storm and fear in the face of a violent regime are one and the same. Indeed, Adorno himself could be held to account for such an interpretation of his theory on the very basis that the objectification of all rational society which he warns of casts society's individual inhabitants as mere unknowing objects, arguably no more culpable for their violent actions than nature is; but to hold Adorno accountable in this way would be to again miss out on the wittingness of the contradictions contained within Adorno's theory.

If there seems at times to be something shrill, morally obtuse, and overwhelmingly nihilistic in Adorno's negative reading of life in just about any epoch he chooses to pass comment upon, partly for the affinity he draws between horrors in each epoch, then it is

<sup>59</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. 1997, p180

worth bearing in mind that this is precisely the antidote to the criticism leveled against Adorno as a quasi-Judaic wishful thinker. The really pressing question, is over just how one theorist might be guilty of both crimes simultaneously, and whether the extremes of each pole - nihilist and quasi-spiritualist, base materialist and transcendentalist - might be taken to temper one another, hope giving its antidote to despair, with realistic materialism keeping that hope in check.

What Adorno seems to argue is that if horror experienced in the face of nature is similar in its effect on the subject as horror experienced at the hands of a social system, and if the shudder is the effective realisation of the subject's unsurpassable linkedness to either nature, or to that social system, then that shudder is also the realisation that the subject is somehow different from that object and from that social system. During the moment of shudder the subject feels itself as part of the object, yet as different from that object; as part of the universal, but as a particular being. Taking this as the case, the subject can feel 'horror' as an effect that it is party to, that it is linked to - in that the subject is linked, via the complex concatenation of nature to the fact of its complicity even with the horror of that linkedness - but at the same time must feel that that horror is not intrinsic to it. That is to say, that there exists something in the fact of the subject's difference from the object - in the fact that it is the subject, as opposed to the object, that brings about an awareness of the link between subject and object and the horror therein entailed - that suggests that things can be otherwise for the subject: This is arguably the significance of the message imparted by the shudder, as earlier highlighted in restoring the term to its rightful place within *DofE*: the shudder as ambiguously concomitant with the cry of terror, which accompanies the subject's realisation of its mere objectivity, and which wards off that terror as a 'naming'. The subject's shuddering, as the fact that it is able to shudder at all is the counterpoint to the subject's shrieking (*Schrecken*) in that the subject's shrieking is only a material and natural impulse; the subject's mimetic reflection of what is presented by the object. The trick played by the subject is to render the insignificance of the

‘naming’ actions it employs as evidence of its existence, in spite even of the meagreness of that existence.

To recap: It has been demonstrated that if shudder stands rightfully in place in the passage discussed above (that first quoted in the main body of this text), in what is indeed the first notable use of the term in Adorno’s career, that term can be taken as representing the opening and closing of a powerful experience existent under certain conditions for primeval man - and one which, indeed, may be experienced, according to Adorno, by modern man in face of the modern artwork, as an experience that both gives life to the subject and takes it away, but which above all conveys the true conditions of its existence. Thus, if the modern subject in the face of the artwork is returned to the experience of primeval man in the face of nature it is returned to the moment at which that given primeval man’s experience of truth was foreclosed no sooner than it was opened - a perpetual and cycling ambiguity. So, if an experience anterior to the various epochs of domination exists, and it is from that place that the shudder emanates (or, indeed, to which it returns in its similitude to that moment), one would have to argue that such a place is always beyond reach, a point, which, in light of the shudder’s material inscription, releases, in some part, Adorno’s thought from the charge of being quasi-messianic in essence. Adorno’s hope is not the hope of a release from the closed confines of a reified society, it is rather the fleeting presentation of the possibility of there existing an alternative to that society, albeit an alternative that offers no immediate redemption as such. One cannot imagine any of the world religion's having acquired their status, as spiritual institutions, on the basis of such an empty promise; such offerings are the preserve of a materialist philosophy.

Here it is necessary to return to a point earlier made regarding the reciprocal interaction of subject and object during the shudder. In the passage cited from *AT* at the head of this chapter, the ‘terror’ of the primordial age ‘is recapitulated vis-a-vis reified objects’, while

in *DofE* it is the natural object and its relation to the subject, a relation with which the subject is entwined, that brings forth the terror concomitant with the moment of shudder. Taken together with Adorno's last mention of the shudder, in the Excursus of *AT*, concerning life's being all that 'shudder's in the subject' one is again left to wonder just what it is that 'springs', when the shudder springs forth. What is it that arises anew in the relation between subject and object at the moment of shudder, given that all that exists in the world *is* either subject or object (supposing that one is to take a dialectical standpoint, as opposed to Brassier's standpoint in *NU* as outlined in Chapter One )?

Given what the shudder apparently does, which, going on all of the accumulated quotes thus far cited, appears to reside primarily in an opening up of the subject to an awareness of its connectedness with that object, and given that such a phenomena imbues the subject with a 'life' as much as it demonstrates to that subject its complicity with objecthood - i.e. its inherent 'non-living' aspect - and given that the object is simultaneously imbued with a meaning, value and purpose, one may - whilst it remains impossible to find any 'higher' outer force at play - wish to construe the roles of subject and object in their normal false separation as momentarily crossing over into one another, whilst maintaining their separate properties. In the moment of shudder the subject is objectified but remains 'alive' to witness this truth, as the object gains 'meaning' (as 'Art'), and becomes subject like, despite its base objecthood. Both subject and object are thus transmogrified. Now, if in this moment the subject becomes brilliantly aware of its oneness with the object, one might assume that such a phenomenon could, by the example it shows, lead to a shift in consciousness for that subject. This is the uncouth flipside of Adorno's hope, albeit one that he never openly endorsed: the notion of the modern artwork as an exemplar urging that everyone respect the object, respect nature, and that, by extension, everyone *love one another*, following on the truth that artwork exposes. In this sense no one need wonder aloud at just how Adorno fell out with his students so gracelessly when they attempted revolution in the style that students across

Europe were compelled to do in the '60's (and, to an as yet lesser extent, today): there was no coincident political form appended to this seemingly boundless 'hope' for the artwork, and hence the charge of bourgeois dilettantism easily followed. How might one rescue Adorno's theory from such a criticism, one that is expressed even today with vehemence from Anti-Capitalist quarters?

Well, to employ a contradiction worthy of Adorno one might counter this by saying that the lack of hope Adorno held for the 1969 German student uprising coincided equally with the hope that Adorno held for the possibility of communicating truth via the artwork: that small hope was a sliver that existed in the shadow of its opposite. When this is applied to Art that hope sounds out, occasionally, in such a way as to impart a message. However, when it comes to violent political conflict, that same sliver leaves itself open to being extinguished by the full - physical, or legislative - force of the State. Therefore, hope as expressed via the artwork is arguably more realistically capable of effecting permanent change than militant political hope. It is a question of leveraging something from within that hope, that might enter into praxis. Those who scoff at the hopeless abstraction of such a notion need look to the utterly hopeless record of political praxis itself in addressing injustice. Small concessions by capital, and apparent victories over tyranny, such as those seen in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 soon see their reversal, as Libya becomes another theatre of war in which allied forces destroy the weapon supplies that they themselves sold to Libya (a war fought on the back of a supposed desire to protect activists in Libya, which caught the Left off guard, for its commitment to revolt). Meanwhile, Western powers scramble to assure that Egypt will not fall into the hands of Islamic Fundamentalists or Leftists. In a world completely in thrall to capital, the systems which maintain and further capitalism (political, financial, judiciary and military) can be morphed and deployed endlessly to prevent its collapse. Recalling, further, that capital is just one form of domination, the overcoming of which would arguably usher in another, Adorno's reticence to back revolutionary movements could be applied today. And in this

light Art is appealed to, not under the misguided notion that its lack of complicity with the wider world (which in any case has been lost over time, due to its marketization) somehow lends it an effective critical and political dimension, but for the lack of any other recourse. Art's 'hope' accords with its ability to feign a remove from the societal domination that nothing (including political opposition to a given form of domination) escapes in reality.

Now, to apply this notion of hope as the 'sliver' of comfort seen in hope's actual effective absence, to the notion of the modern subject being transported to a moment when man experienced 'truth' aside from the restrictions placed upon him by systems of control that were later developed, one might reason that the point that the subject is 'transported to' is not a golden past, but its closure. Put simply; no subject could have been aware of a golden past, a point of perfection existent before forms of domination imposed false conditions on the relationship between subject and object, between man and nature, until that subject were aware of an alternative. In this sense that first shudder, in the face of nature, described in the first quote from *DofE*, was a realisation for primeval man of what was lost to him, the shudder leading, upon its passing, to a naming of that experience which causes it in the first place: The shudder is both the realisation of the power of nature and the subject's intrinsic linkedness to it, *and* the breaking of that link through the apprehension of that experience. In this sense, if modern man experiences the shudder in face of the artwork, as Adorno's argues he can, and if that experience returns him to an understanding of the conditions felt by primeval man in the face of a natural object unfettered by its subjective identification and categorization - by what is termed in English language translations of Adorno's work variously as 'identity thinking', 'identification' or 'administration' - he is returned to the point at which all is lost. The point at which the possibility of there existing a better - or at least more truthfully encountered - world, one in which the truth of our link to nature, and the acceptance even of the negative side of that truth, that is, our subservience to a whole that is greater than

us - is realised only upon its apprehension and categorisation, and therefore upon its passing into the realm of identification, which makes that world - that existence of the subject as aware of his concatenation with nature, of his true conditions of existence - impossible. The 'sliver' of hope registers its own fading to nothing. Whilst, in contradiction, that 'sliver' that faded is hope's inscription.

This is a point clearly attested to in *AT* in relation to the shudder as experienced by modern man in face of the artwork:

The striven-for shudder comes to nothing: It does not occur. One of the paradoxes of the artworks is that what they posit they are actually not permitted to posit; this is the measure of their substantiality.<sup>60</sup>

The statement following upon this quote regards the fact that the artwork cannot offer more than what it contains as the sum of its parts: As with the shudder in the face of nature, the shudder in the face of the artwork is followed by a climb-down. Something perfect and complete, even if it can provide no solace for man, being as indifferent to him as nature is, is hinted at in the ease with which art states its intrinsic lack of purpose, this for Adorno correlating to Kant's 'purposiveness without a purpose', which endows, for Kant, nature with the ability to leave man speechless, in awe of beauty, on account of the interaction of the natural object with the faculties of the subjective mind. Yet for Adorno this perfection is always experienced by the subject as the knowledge of its elusiveness. If, for Kant, the passive appreciation and unhurried acceptance of the natural object by the subject is exemplary of how beings might find mutual accord with nature and with each other, and if for Hegel such an accord must, in contrast, be instigated by the subject in accordance with nature as a kind of procedural whittling away of what is unnecessary, of what is contingent in both subject and object, in order for perfection - as synthesis - to someday reached, Adorno sees no such love-in occurring between subject and object, no

<sup>60</sup> Adorno T.W. 1997, p79

such naturally occurring progressive convenience. What Adorno sees is, rather, an inconvenient truth, but one that in its utterance contains at least the meagre comfort of a truth having been realised.<sup>61</sup>

For Adorno, and this one quote says as much about his 'hope' as is necessary in dispelling the criticisms of those who see him as a wishful thinker, 'Artworks draw credit from a praxis that has yet to begin and no one knows whether anything backs their letters of credit.'<sup>62</sup> Better that the artwork foot the cost of having nothing back its letters of credit then, than an attempt is made through political activism to evoke a future promise of a better world for which there are not the means of backup in reality. In this sense, Adorno's modern artwork becomes a theoretical tool for the possibility of social change being evoked, even in the absence of any real possibility of change taking place. This then is hope as a transcendent social capacity, more than as a transcendent capacity in the quasi-spiritual sense.

To what extent Adorno really offers anything to anyone aside from an interpretation of the contradictory nature of existence, an existence whereby hope lives in the shadow of its opposite, as a condition of that hope existing at all, resides in whether anything in the moment of shudder might be seen as moving one forward, not forward towards a better time, but forward in terms of, perhaps, a better qualitative experience of 'life', made possible as the realisation of the true conditions that underpin that 'life'. If the shudder offers no hope for a better future, can it offer at least a reality different to the one experienced now (as reified and objectified existence, what one might term 'lifeless life'), and in doing so, can it be credited with evoking 'life' as such? For the register of any

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<sup>61</sup> The notion of such a traversal depends for its logic on a dialectical method. The existence of unfreedom must imply the possibility of its opposite. This indeed is the debt that Adorno owes Hegel, but in negative form, as Adorno does not see the opposition of dialectical contrasts rising to 'Spirit', but rather that opposition, as implied in the simple base existence of subject and object, being indicative of the possibility of things being 'other' to how they are. Though for relations between subject and object to change fundamentally a radical re-thinking on the part of the subject is required. A 'thought thinking against itself', thus being the premise of 'negative dialectics', as expounded in Adorno's book of the same name.

<sup>62</sup> Adorno. *Ibid.*, p83.



meaningful movement, any change as such, requires ‘life’ in the ‘subject’. What in the shudder can move us, can make us ‘anew’?

---On Shuddering Anew---

The significance of the new, for Adorno, could be seen as issuing from the fact that the shudder brings forth a moment that is *new*, a ‘life’, in that life requires new moments, as much as implying that the new brings forth the shudder. To use an example, a heart cannot only beat once, but must beat anew for the body to at least appear to ‘live’, so much as human ‘life’ can be understood on a base physical level. Of course, this base level says nothing of a life that is truly ‘lived’ and for that the unfurling of a changing qualitative experience is needed, as the continued occurrence of dynamic qualitatively defined ‘moments’, so far as a ‘moment’ can only be construed by the temporally aware ‘living’ subject. As Adorno states:

Scars of damage and disruption are the modern’s seal of authenticity; by their means, art desperately negates the closed confines of the ever same; explosion is one of its variants. Anti-traditional energy becomes a voracious vortex.<sup>63</sup>

If scars of damage and disruption are the modern’s seal of authenticity it may be ruminated that these are scars inflicted by the shudder on false ‘identity thinking’; ‘the closed confines of the eversame’. These scars may be seen as a sort of obverse wounding; a ‘scar’ is the trace of the healing of a wound. This tallies with the notion, as aforementioned, that the shudder precedes the artwork; it is the artwork that hails the shudder’s existence, bearing, as it does, the scar left by the shudder’s healing of the wound borne by society on account of its predilection towards identity thinking.

It has already been demonstrated that the shudder, in its newness, does not hail a new age as such, but returns the subject to the experience of a bygone age, even if this presents a

<sup>63</sup> Adorno T.W. *Ibid.*, p23

problematic notion, made reasonable only on account of considerable concessions granted to such an idea: That, primarily, such an implication hints merely at the similitude in the experience of the modern man who shudders when compared to the primeval man that shuddered, and to those generations that passed between, rather than pointing to a miraculous turn by which the present finds in its future a past free from the negative impulses of society.

Now, as it has been demonstrated that nothing in the shudder removes the subject from the horror that that shudder follows upon, and that, further, it does nothing in the way of instituting a movement in thought or in praxis that might build upon the subject's realisation of its intrinsic link with nature and with society one might well ask what it is in the 'newness' of the shudder that is in any sense 'new'?

Adorno approaches the temporal connotations attached to the sudden and explosive moment of shudder, and to what that explosiveness does in a characteristically complex manner. The question asked here, is whether that moment of explosion, that 'voracious vortex', is anything but the register of an explosion as apprehended by the advanced sensory apparatus of the human 'object', or whether that explosion is the coming into being of a 'life' that 'lives'. Though it is necessary to digress here in assessing exactly what is at stake for Adorno when the term 'life' is used.

The job is made easy here in that Adorno so lucidly expresses what he means by 'life' in the dedication he makes at the beginning of *MM*, a book sub-headed '*Reflections from Damaged life*', to his earlier collaborator, Max Horkheimer:

'He who wishes to know the truth about life in its immediacy', Adorno starts, 'must scrutinize its estranged form, the objective powers that determine individual existence even in its most hidden recesses. To speak immediately of the immediate is to behave much as those novelists who drape their marionettes in imitated bygone passions like cheap jewelry and make people who are no more than component parts of machinery

act as if they still had the capacity to act as subjects, and as if something depended on their actions. Our perspective of life has passed into an ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer.’<sup>64</sup>

One might be left wondering if there were any point pursuing this study, in light of the credulity Adorno gives to the human subject’s lack of ‘life’, ‘Life does not live’, being the quote, from one Ferdinand Kurnburger, which opens *MM*. However, one sees in the quote the antimony inherent to Adorno’s thought regarding life: the notion that ‘life’ does not ‘live’ inscribes the fact that on the terms under which the subject, as object, experiences ‘things’, there is something that it terms ‘life’, and so long as there is ‘life’, the possibility of that ‘life’ ‘living’- ‘*living*’ being the attendant verb form necessary for the noun ‘life’ to exist actively - presents itself.

Now, problematically, the fact of that ‘life’s’ ‘living’ has been here presented as possible on account of the linguistic identification of phenomena that appear to themselves as real (i.e. ‘life’ and ‘living’) implies that ‘life’ has passed over into identification, that which is identified as ‘life’, a fact which makes real ‘lived’ ‘life’, as that which is not identified, and therefore objectified, nigh on impossible. Yet Adorno at no point concedes to ‘life’s’ complete impossibility on these or similar terms. Indeed, Adorno follows shortly upon the above statement with the following:

Should the appearance of life, which the sphere of consumption itself defends for such bad reasons, be once entirely effaced, then the monstrosity of absolute production will triumph.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, the appearance of life, even as a categorical cipher within the wider ‘identified society’ is absolutely essential in that its faint register of hope indicates that ‘life’ just might exist.

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<sup>64</sup> Adorno T.W. *Minima Moralia* , Verso, 1978, p15

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

This is characteristic of Adorno, who upon arguing that ‘The question asked by a character in Sartre’s play *Morts Sans Sepulchre* “How can there be any meaning in life when men exist who beat others until the bones break in their bodies,” is also the question of whether art has a right to exist,’ in his 1961 essay ‘*On Commitment*’, follows shortly after in the same essay with a complete *volte-face*: ‘but art must continue to exist so that its existence is not a surrender to cynicism’.<sup>66</sup>

That Art's continuing to exist is intrinsic to the possibility of ‘life’ ‘living’ is, as one might deduce from all that has thus far passed here, a point central to Adorno’s theory. Yet a question over just how Adorno might extricate himself from the negativity of his own thought is still warranted. One may now ask what it is about Art that might enable a transcendence of the market and of the violence experienced by man, as, essentially, his ‘objectification’ - his effective failure to ‘live’ under the terms of an advanced capitalist society - to put it bluntly, his ‘death’? How is it that Art might stop man from being reduced, as such, to an object?’

In answering this it is necessary to return to the shudder and to its affects, not least to this ‘voracious vortex’ - a breaking away from the ‘restrictive confines of the ever same’. In so doing it will be noted that the ‘shudder’ seems to move the subject in three directions at once; towards newness, towards a distant age (with, of course the disclaimers henceforth discussed in place) and towards a better future, if only - in the latter case - by the ‘hope’ that it infers.

Following upon the quote last given Adorno argues that, in the moment of ‘explosion’ bought about by the artwork:

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<sup>66</sup> Harrison C., and Woods P. *Art in Theory, An Anthology of Changing Ideas 1900-2000*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p780

[Antitraditional energy becomes a voracious vortex]. To this extent, the modern is myth turned against itself; the timelessness of myth becomes the catastrophic instant that destroys temporal continuity [...]<sup>67</sup>

Shudder, as such, does not operate in the register of linear time. Rather, it places the subject outside of that time in the experience of a kind of a-temporality as 'temporal continuity' is destroyed. Of course, as this moment is only fleeting, it may be argued that it is necessary to contextualise precisely what happens to time in that instant when it 'appears' to a given subject to be absent - that moment, for instance, when one becomes lost in the contemplation of a painting or a piece of music, unaware of the passing of events aside from those immediately apprehended in the artwork. How is it that a 'vortex' can be 'voracious'?

The answer to this arguably hinges on what it means for something to be 'new'. It has already been argued that the new is beyond being 'identified', so it could further proffered that the new enjoys no history, no apprehension and no 'name' as such. The new is thus the experience of not knowing, of not being able to categorise and apprehend experience. What happens to temporality is therefore a question that may just as well pose itself as rhetorical if we are to explore the shudder on Adorno's terms, for at the moment of shudder, the subject loses its sense of self as such, and in so doing realizes its affinity with the object in such a way as to render accounts of linear history or time obsolete. In that case, one could ask quite how it is that this experience may be conducive to 'life' being 'lived', when it appears, in fact, to render the system of measurement by which the individual subject may apprehend itself, that is 'temporal linearity' - a factor that demarcates through its measuring of time the objective realm - as obsolete. As regards spatial considerations, the same could be said - the subject surely cannot define itself spatially any more than any other object can, once jilted into an awareness of its own

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<sup>67</sup> Adorno. T.W. 1997, p23

base objectivity. However, one must be sure to realise just how 'fleeting' a moment of 'newness' is for Adorno:

The new wants non-identity, yet intention reduces it to identity [*the 'old', the identified*]; Modern art constantly works at the Münchhausean trick of carrying out the identification of the non-identical.<sup>68</sup>

The new is a constantly repeated cycle, perpetually undone by its identification.

Taken in this sense one might say that the judgment as to what constitutes 'Modern Art' is a value judgment that operates by dint of whether a given work evokes *newness*; whether it evokes shudder. Old art is not then inferior to new art; one may choke and one may shudder in the presence of a Michelangelo, for example, but to do so would be unlikely in light of the industry that has surrounded the artist in general; all vitality, all life is lost in the artwork in a society that reduces the individual work to the cipher of ownership - to the monetary symbol - and much that is old, that is traditional, has been categorised, formalized, reduced to a capital value and therefore nullified for all subjects, regardless of whether they have personally identified that given artwork at a prior time. Where Adorno failed to state this he did, of course, run the risk, in his predilection towards new art, of sounding a strange and contradictory enthusiasm for the notion of linear progress (i.e. that of new Art being superior to old 'art'), running in contradistinction to the dismay he held for such a notion in general; 'I see no linear history running from barbarity to civilization, but I do see one running from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.'

This was, however, not a tendency that factored into Adorno's consideration of the artwork and of society anymore than his wider philosophy; he rather felt that the

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

conditions under which the viewer might experience the non-identical (the true condition of experience as opposed to that which had been 'identified' under rationalist and formal predicates) via the shudder in face of the artwork becomes narrowed as soon as that artwork had been registered, understood and identified within wider society. It is for this reason, perhaps, that it is to 'tradition' that Adorno issues criticism and not to the 'old' when he considers the arts. It is in taking this into account that we might argue that the fate that Adorno felt as befalling the traditional artwork might indeed have befallen all new artworks, and art in general, in our contemporary age, and indeed at some point preceding the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as rationality gained a stronghold on thought and action, thus making its most negative impacts be known: just as 'oldness' was no handicap to art as such, so newness is no defence, in that any 'new' work can be beset by the 'tradition' that is the perpetual identification of all objects under inadequate predicates. In looking then to how one might restore to the subject the possibility of experiencing shudder in an age when the truly new, or novel, artwork is impossible, 'newness' or 'oldness' may cease to be a deciding factor in the conventional sense, whilst the correlation between the artwork and society may have to change.

That is to say, we need not ask if any 'new' artwork is possible, because entwined in the same question is the question of whether Art is possible, full stop: In a society completely free from identification an artwork of any age would be seen for what it is - unhampered by false categorizations that serve to dampen its message - as would nature, as would society as a whole. The question of its newness would then be a null point. For this reason, getting caught up in 'newness' is arguably a wasteful experience and one which might have the artist falling over themselves trying to experiment artistically in ever more novel ways, thus becoming mercenary to a notion of progress which produces artworks perhaps no more groundbreaking than the works of those artists who are direct mercenaries to the market (i.e. graphic designers, directors and producers of tv advertisements, etc)! As perhaps has been evidenced by the development of art in the last

twenty years; not least in London, art's corporate heart, the march of the ever new, becomes the march of the ever same.<sup>69</sup>

---The New and the Dead---

If the shudder evokes newness, as such, and the modern artwork evokes shudder in the subject, it is to the shudder one should look to ascertain just how 'new' the experience of the subject is when faced with a particular artwork. To say that when one 'shudders' there is newness is perhaps more accurate than to say that the new artwork evokes shudder. Even if turning things upside down in this way goes against the seeming grain of Adorno's doctrine of the artwork as summed up here:

The shudder is a reaction to the cryptically shut, which is a function of that element of indeterminacy. At the same time, however, the shudder is a mimetic comportment reacting mimetically to abstractness. Only in the new does mimesis unite with rationality without regression.<sup>70</sup>

Mimesis, which is for Adorno a byword for the way in which humans falsely substitute objects for experience - in order to ward off either primary nature, as with the use of magic charms, mythic tales and religious rituals which mimic the power of nature in order to once remove its threat, or to ward off secondary nature, the threat posed by other men, through the accumulation of wealth and status - speaks in the new artwork a truth. This is because for Adorno, the new artwork, in parallel with Kant's beautiful natural object, pertains to having no contingent purpose; thus its mimesis is a mimesis of the true purposelessness of life in a reified society - coincident with a social system which renders life as 'meaningless objectivity' - and can only communicate such a message prior to its

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<sup>69</sup> That 'shock' and 'sensation' became bywords in the boom period of British art in the 1990's perhaps attests to this tendency.

<sup>70</sup> Adorno T.W. 1997, p20



identification and the coincident purpose that is pinned upon it as a culturally or monetarily significant (or, indeed, insignificant) artifact.

In the above quote Adorno implies differing moments of mimesis are flip sides of the same instant; 'i.e. the shudder is a mimetic comportment reacting mimetically to abstractness'. Jay Bernstein finds accord with this sentiment, in underscoring the ethical import of the artistic experience in 'The Fate of Art':

Shudder and mimesis are different aspects of the same moment. Through them there occurs a joining of eros to knowledge which is arts articulation of ethics and knowledge.

Shudder, as dissonance is staged aestheticised, sublime fear, it is the affective acknowledge of the otherness of the other.<sup>71</sup>

The dissonant here can be taken to be the staged abstractness of the modern artwork, and though it is possible to take exception at Bernstein's all too convenient suggestion that art bears an inherently ethical posture, one is left with a powerful parallel between mimesis, as the flip side of shudder, and the cry of horror '*Schrecken*' as the flip side of shudder. Returning to the first quote from *DofE* it may be possible to construe the cry (*Shrecken*) of terror that wards off nature as a mimesis of the horror of nature.

It is, indeed, a central tenet of the aforementioned 'Elements of Anti-Semitism' (*DofE*) that the terror stricken subject freezes in a fixed 'grimace', as a kind of mimesis of the death mask, a one size fits all facial expression which defers the horror of nature, employed by the movie star as equally as the despot orator. The possibility of life in the subject can be seen as concordant with preceding statements in this study, which have found the shudder, a movement of sorts, to be the inherent flip side of that paralysis: a

<sup>71</sup> J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, Polity Press, 1993, p222

moment which opens up from the closure of mimesis (or *Schrecken*) in the face of the 'new' (which, for Adorno, as stated, can only be a 'new' artwork). The counter to this grimace, impotent in its mimesis of death is for Adorno the active 'cry' of the party rally, or of the wailing bomb: 'The screaming/yelling (*EJ/JC*) [*Schrecken*] is as cold blooded as business'. In either case, whether grimacing or screaming:

'The victims are the false counterparts of the dread mimesis.' (*JC*)<sup>72</sup>

'They are the false likeness of the terrified mimesis.' (*EJ*)<sup>73</sup>

But if it is this same cry that gives way to shudder, as has been here suggested, then it is for Adorno the new artwork that gives way to shudder in such a way as to convey to the subject the true nature of its ambiguity – the constant circling of the shudder and *Schrecken*. Not all mimesis is a mimesis of horror, and the artwork is rather, in its mimesis of society, also the mimesis of the belief that society holds in its ability to surpass nature. It is, perhaps, with the horror of nature suspended - for the feigned autonomy of the artwork - that the subject engages with the artwork, enabling it to encounter the truth of the fallacy that society is predicated upon, and the truth of its own *being*, concatenated within yet separate from the natural object. The artwork's newness is the ruse that sidesteps ratio whilst feigning what rationality always wanted to become.

However, what Adorno actually sees as 'new' in terms of artworks is enough to suggest that that which shudders evokes the 'new', whilst what does so need not necessarily be 'new' as such:

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<sup>72</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1997, p183

<sup>73</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 2002, p150

‘Ratio itself becomes mimetic in the shudder of the new and it does so with incomparable power in Edgar Allen Poe, truly a beacon for Baudelaire and all modernity. The new is a blindspot, as empty as the purely indexical gesture “look here.”’<sup>74</sup>

The citation of Edgar Allen Poe’s works, some 120 years after Poe’s death as exemplary of the new impulse, an impulse which escapes identification by the market, at a time when his books were extensively available for sale - with no less than eight films of his stories having been released in the 1960s - and read no less than today suggests that the new is an impulse, communicated via artwork’s on account of their conveying ‘shudder’ and that an artwork may convey that impulse even when it is not so new.

Adorno’s fixation with Beckett, to cite a further example, at a time when Beckett was a cultural icon, his plays entering the mainstream of cultural discussion, also suggests that an artwork having been popularly known for some period of time need not prevent it from evoking shudder if that artwork possesses within it an element resistant to comprehension - an abstract element such that cannot be deciphered; thus if the new ‘is a blindspot’, there may exist blindspots in old or even in marketable works which can be experienced anew by the subject, and which can render the subject ‘anew’ in that it shudders in the presence of the artwork. Beckett’s and Poe’s effect was ‘new’. Their artworks were not strikingly so.

So if it stands that newness can be invoked, even if the truly new never before seen artistic activity cannot be bought into fruition, and even if a particular artwork has been categorised, sold, written about, and so on, then it may stand that ‘life’ as such can exist even in a reified society, being that life needs for its purpose that something inheres in the subject, and given that the shudder (the new) apparently moves the subject in such a way.

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<sup>74</sup> Adorno T.W. 1997, p20

Now we have already seen that there is arguably something in the experience of shudder which negates the possibility of the subject experiencing its 'self' - i.e. the loss of the identificatory forms which render perception possible. However, given the shudder's fleetingness, and the subject's sudden realisation upon its passing of what was momentarily lost (the self) and gained (the truth of its linkedness with the object) it is possible to argue that in a society wherein subjects experience themselves as objectified (or as 'lifeless'), the moment of shudder, and of its passing, is a moment of awakening to an 'experience', and to 'life' as such, as the experience of newness, felt on the part of the subject in the face of the art object.

Robert Hullot-Kentor, discusses in the translator's introduction to his new rendition of 'Philosophy of New Music' (2008) - originally '*Philosophie der neuen Musik*' - the importance of newness within Adorno's work, in part in reference to his decision to render the title of the book 'Philosophy of New Music' and not 'Philosophy of Modern Music' as it had been rendered in the translation undertaken by Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (1973). Here Hullot-Kentor identifies a problem with Blomster's title, namely its programmatic nature, pointing to Schoenberg's (the composer to which one half of the book is dedicated, the other half being set over to Stravinsky) dislike of the term 'modern' in support of this thesis: The 'modern', is that which is already too late, as opposed to the 'utterly new', which for Adorno, and seemingly for Schoenberg too, was the only type of music capable of standing opposed to the 'culture industry' product.

However, given that Adorno cited nothing 'utterly new' - in the sense that one understands this to mean 'just made', across his whole oeuvre when lauding the 'right kind' of artworks, preferring to applaud, in the 1960s, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, as opposed to - for example - Hendrix's '*Electric Ladyland*', we can argue that the new, for Adorno, was clearly an impulse, something (as is the case anyhow with relation to the

German ‘*Neue*’, for which ‘New’ is Hullot-Kentor’s translation, something he himself attests to) akin to the ‘modern’ in common English usage.

Though where Hullot-Kentor, along with Schoenberg, and Adorno, draws a line between the new and the modern, favouring the former, in an act that confuses being that Adorno clearly favours the generically new (the ‘*Neue*’ or ‘modern’), over that which is ‘utterly new’ (i.e. ‘the modern’) as a system of categorization - the latter being perhaps too blasé, too *a la moda*, and thus, arguably, too entwined with the culture industry - for Adorno's high art sensibilities, one might better conflate the new and the modern, the latter being a byword for the former, but also being expressive of an impulse which resonates beyond its era, thus making Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup> describable as new, or modern, even centuries after its performance.

This all only really becomes possible if the shudder evokes the new and therefore ‘life’, and not vice-versa, because if it were the new that evoked shudder, then literal newness would be the only gauge for whether something shuddered. So we may say, that the shudder evokes the new, and Beethoven’s symphony evokes shudder, for Adorno.

The artwork shows to the subject its pretence to perfection in its apparent abstraction from the world - ‘apparent’ as it is from the world that it derives and in which it exists - its aloofness and detachment from mere objects, its standing apart from society as an elevated form - i.e. ‘Art’- , as a lie (as the absolute commodity), the truth of which resides in its very existence; illusion is central to arts being. In showing the subject this illusion the latter is jilted into a realisation of the wider illusion, or ‘lie’, at play - that evoked by society and by its attendant system of thought ‘*ratio*’ or ‘*identity thinking*.’ Yet what the artwork ultimately shows to the subject, is not its brilliance in transcending the social system, but its linkedness with the system, thus: ‘One of the paradoxes of the artwork is that what they posit they are not permitted to posit; this is the measure of their

substantiality.’ The illusion that the artwork presents, that of its estrangement from the reified world, cannot actually exist, being that the substance of such a work is the substance of that world, merely re-shaped. As such nothing in the way of the conditions of life experienced by the subject actually changes in the moment of shudder.

Of course one may ruminate on this basis that all is lost, and point to Adorno’s polemic negativity as evidence for the uselessness of following any path that wishes to confer ‘life’ on the subject, and therefore ‘hope’ to society. However, in answer to the charge that trying to restore hope borders on the kind of romanticism that critics of Adorno hold in near-contempt, it should be pointed out that the shudder itself does not offer a hope of any kind of deliverance from rationality and objectification; it rather exists under the aegis of rationality and of the object, as the only terms under which life can thus be construed.

The purpose of this discussion here regarding the new artwork has been to construe a reading of Adorno that would make the shudder possible under the worst case scenario - that no new art existed of a type that could elicit shudder and that the system of objectification had come so far in society as to render it impossible for any element to stand aside from it. Art, as it has now been construed, is what shudders, and what shudders evokes the new. Now, it is then possible that ‘Art’ might exist for the subject, but one has to turn the question on its head, and ask whether that subject might exist, as ‘alive’ for the artwork, and so, by extension, considering the co-dependence of the artwork and subject, whether they, and indeed anything may be said to ‘exist’ under the terms that a ‘life’ may be said to ‘live’? Does Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup> fall on *dead* ears?

---The Parable of the Oarsmen---

In *DofE* Adorno and Horkheimer explain the predicament that society finds itself within as regards whether ‘truth’ may or may not be accurately comprehended, with reference to the myth of Odysseus and the ‘Parable of the Oarsman’. In the parable, Odysseus and his ship's crew veer closely on their nautical travels to a small island upon which the ‘Sirens’ live, women whose enchanting song threatens to distract the men from their journey, thus potentially leading them to fall prey to the various forces that set out to thwart Odysseus’ hubristic ambitions. Odysseus' cunning devises a clever means of escape, but one that binds him to fate, as equally as it allows him to escape it:

He knows only two possibilities of escape. One he prescribes to his comrades. He plugs their ears with wax and orders them to row with all their might. Anyone who wishes to survive must not listen to the temptation of the irrecoverable, and is unable to listen only if he is unable to hear. Society has always made sure that this was the case. Workers must look ahead with alert concentration and ignore anything which lies to one side.<sup>75</sup>

The other possibility he has applied to himself: tied to the mast on his own request by his men, he is able to command the ship's direction whilst being unable to respond to the Sirens' lure.

As Adorno and Horkheimer, point out, however, the path Odysseus takes is still the fatefully prescribed path, running close to the island on which the Sirens are based. Odysseus did not succumb to the Sirens as such, yet in not succumbing he had himself and his men bound. And who ultimately is to say that this, indeed, is not the fate that nature had pre-ordained to Odysseus and his crew; eluding primary nature, they are bound by a secondary nature, which is itself a product of first nature? Where, therefore, Fredric Jameson, in his ‘Late Marxism’ sees the lure of the Sirens as representative of the ‘artwork’, the ‘truth’, as conveyed by the ‘shudder’ which, as has here been argued, can

<sup>75</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 2002, p26

only ever be fleeting, the truth being one that in any case is not emancipatory as such, one might just as well see Odysseus' actions as being the 'artistry', which pits itself against the fearful domination of nature, by presenting itself as somehow outside the systems of identification which characterize man's interaction with nature.<sup>76</sup> Odysseus' constraint of himself and his men is the 'cry' that names, and which escapes the 'horror' of nature, no sooner than it matches that horror, in that the truth it tells is one about there being no escape from the individual subject's 'complex concatenation within nature'. This impacts on the shudder in relation to subjective freedom, as will now be argued.

Firstly, it must be acknowledged that Adorno and Horkheimer intended a link be made between 'shudder' and the wider exploits of Odysseus in the second Chapter of *DofE* – entitled 'Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment' - from which the reference to the 'Parable of the Oarsman' derives, a point made explicit in that same chapter, some six paragraphs prior to the above cited passage:

The primeval world is secularised as the space he measures out; the old demons populate only the distant margins and islands of the civilized Mediterranean, retreating into the forms of rock and cave from which they had originally sprung in the face of primal dread [*Schauer*]. The adventures bestow names on each of these places and the names give rise to a rational overview of space. – *EJ*<sup>77</sup>

'The prehistoric world is secularized as the space whose measure the self must take; and the old demons inhabit the distant bounds and islands of the civilized Mediterranean, forced back into the forms of rock and cavern whence they once emerged in the dread [*Schauer*] remoteness of antiquity. But the epic adventures allow

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<sup>76</sup> Jameson F. *Late Marxism*, Verso, 1996, p130-131

<sup>77</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 2002, p38



each location a proper name and permit space to be conveyed in a rational manner.’ –

JC<sup>78</sup>

The ‘old demons’ that had initially been invoked under the naming facet of shudder (here rendered as dread in both cited translations), as the emergence of ‘spirit’, or this or that ‘god’, the cry of whose name wards off the threat of nature, are reduced to the logical strata of informed categorization, dark caves are given names, before being reduced, under the Enlightenment project - for which Odysseus is a precursor, to geological data.

But it must be noted that the Sirens are not ‘named’ and thus nullified as such: Their potential danger is tempered for Odysseus’s crew, whilst for Odysseus, though they can be heard, their song is as useless to him as it becomes to them, in light of the fact, that whilst he can hear it, he cannot succumb to its temptation. Just as Odysseus’ name was earlier ‘Nobody’, it is through the stripping of the ‘name’ from the Sirens - the deafness to their call - that Odysseus prospers, although it is a prospering that has him temporarily reduced to the status of a ‘Nobody’, along with his crew.

Now, had the Sirens represented 'Art', as Jameson argues, then it would be society, as represented by the slave and master (the crew and Odysseus) that is blinded to the truth that Art conveys from outside society, a nonsensical observation in that Art is man made, and not given over to us by another higher or 'other' force, represented here in the form of mystical island dwelling songstresses. In fact, Jameson’s identification of Art as something that bestows a truth on man from outside, and which is then closed to man by the stratified social system (Odysseus marking the scientific and capitalist class, that unwittingly rids all humanity, including itself, from any vestige of freedom) returns us to the problem over precisely where the ‘shudder’ derives from, if not from the known social and natural processes that exist.

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<sup>78</sup> Adorno T.W., and Horkheimer M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1997, p46

We could better present Odysseus' cunning in the role of Art - the Sirens being the call of both first and second nature - or indeed, as a precursor to Art in the mythic age: the hero's hubris representing the 'absolute commodity' which the artwork, for Adorno, becomes in the age of rationality. Of course, this presents the problem over precisely who the Art viewer is: the shudder is experienced by the viewer in face of the made artwork, so Odysseus's actions themselves are not those that can be considered for him the 'artwork' which evokes 'shudder', shudder being that which throws upon the subject the realisation of its linkedness between itself and the object, nature, and the simultaneous hope effected from the fact of the subject's being present and aware of its difference from the object, from without. Now, if we are to use this parable as an example of what it is shudder represents it seems sensible to render the Sirens as representing nature, Odysseus as concatenated within nature, but knowingly so, in his realisation of the impossibility of escaping it - following, as he does, a path alongside the Sirens, completely smitten by them, if not given over to them in body - and the relationship between the Sirens, Odysseus, and the other factors pertinent to this tale as presenting the artwork to which the early reader, given the novelty of the form that Homer presented to them, succumbed to in a 'shudder'; the text effecting a critique of the mythic system of identification - that which rendered false the relationship between subject and object - at the time. The shudder is presented within the spectrum of the tangible (as presented to the reader of the Odyssey), thus wrought from the interplay between Adorno and Horkheimer, Homer and Jameson, which would otherwise have the possibility of its existence refracted through the kaleidoscopic lens of too much cross referencing from theorist to theorist and theorist to artwork (the latter being the original text). If the instance of shudder existed in Homer's Odyssey, it had to be as immediately present in the text, not as allegorical - allegory being another form of identification which once removes a factor from its factuality.

The question, once again, is over whether any such text, or other art form, might similarly effect the shudder, thus evoking the ‘new’ in the subject, giving them the ‘hope’ that they may be differentiated from a mere object today? Though posing the Odyssey as the allegory with which to confront such a problem is problematic. As true Art it may always be capable of effecting the new, but as testament to the society we live in, and the form of control that society metes out, this study proposes the following appropriation of the Parable of the Oarsman:

---The Super-Panopticon---

A world in which every surface is occupied by a seamless camera and every human individual is plugged permanently into the camera, receiving a constant stream of images through a surgically applied eye visor.

Each individual receives the same images, which are transmitted randomly, and remains constantly aware that any point an image of themselves may be beamed across the network (‘Super-Pan’), which is viewed perpetually by every other individual on the planet .

The individual is powerless to break the one and only law that guides the Super-Panoptic society – a rule punishable by social ostracization, a removal from the system, and an effective ceasing of their existence.

Rule 1, the only rule, is that ‘Thou shalt not remove your visor’.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The system is self maintained, as in a society where absolute surveillance is a reality, life outside that which is monitored appears to be a form of non-existence - mortality. Therefore any transcendence of the surveillance system is avoided at all costs. Whether or not anyone is controlling the system is superfluous to the point, as the system could just as easily be self perpetuating without an independent monitor. The advance of surveillance beckons its eventual ubiquity in this way: In a completely advanced surveillance society there can be no escape even for those who developed the technology in order to initially further their own interests.

In this sense the advance of history through all of its guises may be seen not as one leading to ever greater dominance of more and more persons by fewer and fewer barons. It may rather be seen as the gradual advance of surveillance: From the castle on the hill, to the town hall that employs a small body of local sheriffs to gather information, to an advanced state and police network, supported by the media, to, eventually, the Super-Pan.

Such a system becomes as entirely self-supporting, as thorough as the system of identification that Adorno describes arguably is. The temptation becomes not one of whether to visit the Sirens, to see what they offer over the oath you are forced to take, but what would happen if the visor is removed, if identification is sidestepped. Yet to sidestep identification is equated with the death that is implied by the true knowledge of one's oneness with the object (with nature). Whilst to leave the visor on implies the 'death' of a dreary lifeless existence at the hands of a sanitised and reified society. What in the way of artistic - or other - opposition to such a system could be conceivably possible?

Before addressing this, one may want to ask - this being the real test of Adorno's thought - after whether the conditions for the subject to experience 'shudder' ever did exist? Though given the objections that can be raised to Adorno and Horkheimer's inquiry into the minds of men not known to them, it seems fitting here that such a question be asked with regard to the present, though not necessarily with regard to contemporaneous artworks.

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The term Super-Panopticon appears to have been first used by Marc Poster, in the Information Society Reader, 2004, pages 403 & 405. However, there seems considerable grounds to re-explore the phenomenon, as one which now operates by public consent, as well as by public volition. Rather than the cameras working in one direction, as the surveillance of the public by law enforcement agencies, it appears that the public, with cameras ever at the ready, are just as implicit in this surveillance machine as the 'State', as was found, on several occasions in April of 2009: first footage of passer by Ian Tomlinson being attacked by police at the G20 protest on April 1<sup>st</sup>, next; following this - in an unrelated incident - the Assistant chief Police commissioner resigned after inadvertently revealing top-secret documents to a journalist's camera. In a slightly different scenario, the watchers again became the watched as the home secretary's husband was caught out, following her submission of an expenses form upon which was registered his subscription to a pornographic cable tv service. More recently, whistle blower sites such as Wikileaks demonstrate that the perpetual flow of information can be used against those in power (though with little discernible political result, it should be noted).

It seems no one is free from the surveillance machine, and, further, that everyone finds themselves as an operator of it. In a sense this is empowering, hence 'do not remove your visor'; doing so makes you a hapless object of the machine, yet unable to participate in it.

'Super-Pan' is the abbreviated easier to pronounce and more user friendly term correlative to contemporary super-panopticism, a system of enforcement that is both a friend and foe of the people. These two sides of the panopticon, accord with Adorno's perception of capitalism as allowing enormous freedoms, but also as limiting them. Naturally, both capitalism and surveillance are two concomitant aspects of the process of objectification (identification) and so bear the concordant double-sidedness that characterises the Enlightenment project for Adorno.

### ---Locating the Shudder---

To assess whether the shudder is possible *now* it is necessary to subject a particular artist or artwork to scrutiny, and although this study aims at addressing ‘now’, it seems fair that in assessing Adorno’s theorem we first assess this in regard to those the artists he personally favoured.

First things first, a cautionary note must be issued with regard to another of Adorno’s arguable errors of judgment - the reverence with which he holds those artists whom he believes created artworks that may evoke the ‘shudder’. There is certainly little that can be described as a rational account in Adorno’s entire oeuvre when it comes to his assessment of those writers and musicians he lauds: principally Charles Baudelaire, Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, Gustav Mahler, Edgar Allen Poe and Arnold Schoenberg. Certainly a straight comparison between these five named, and a cataloguing of the principle elements common to all would be enough to ascertain what Adorno was driving at when he assumed some works to deliver shudder and some not to - the melancholic, the macabre and the dissonant are arguably the three key features common to all, with the latter here being imported from music terminology to account for the ‘off kilter’ when applied to literature (such as in Gregor Samsor’s realisation that he has been transformed into a ‘beast’ in sentence one of Kafka’s ‘Metamorphosis’).<sup>80</sup> However, there is little in the way of balanced judgment offered as to whether Kafka’s texts, or indeed those of Poe and Baudelaire, together with the musical compositions of Mahler and Schoenberg, and the theatre of Beckett did indeed evoke the shudder. And, whilst the macabre and the melancholic are easily identifiable, it is questionable whether such effects were liable to have shocked the attendee of Mahler’s *9<sup>th</sup> Symphony* out of his seat, anymore than out of

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<sup>80</sup> David Cunningham argued that dissonance should be considered a term that applies across musical genres, and indeed outside the remit of music and art in general, in his *Notes on Nuance: Rethinking a Philosophy of Modern Music*, Radical Philosophy 125, pp17 – 26, Russell Press, Nottingham. 2004.

his complacent acceptance of a false boundary drawn between himself and nature by the prevalent rational thought system!

Certainly, it would be missing the point to argue that there could be nothing left to shock the populace in a world so devoid of sense as one beholden to rationalism, whereby everything is reduced in essence to its mere capital value, as Adorno had it. In fact, it was the falseness of such a world, which always aimed to cover over its own abstract perversity with mollifying lies, fed by the 'culture industry' that for Adorno necessitated that an abstract and dark form of art be used to counter it:

To survive reality at its most extreme and grim, artworks that do not want to sell themselves as consolation must equate themselves with that reality. Radical art today is synonymous with dark art; its primary colour is black.<sup>81</sup>

Whilst this statement may be sound, and it is the soundness of this statement that one must ask after, as the shudder itself merely turns man on to the true relations that exist between him and nature (as identified by ratio) and between himself and 'second nature' (that is, man's domination over himself) by exposing the lie that ratio presents, the soundness of the statement might have stood alone more adequately than it does when applied to particular artists and artworks with the certitude that Adorno thus applies it (a point that will be returned to later in this chapter) if Adorno had, rather, postulated the existence of shudder as possible by dint of what *Art is*. That is to say, that it could be maintained that as Art is essentially without purpose in the sense that politics, religion, and the sciences have purpose. it cannot be identified, and as beyond identification, it is therefore capable of rupturing the falsified conditions under which the subject experiences the object. It could further be argued that 'Art' is then what evokes shudder, and that which does not evoke shudder is not truly 'Art', having been swallowed by the systems of identification and their coincident industrial and economic forms - the 'culture

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<sup>81</sup> Adorno T.W. *Aesthetic Theory*, p39

industry' as a sub sector of the capitalist industry. As such Adorno's theory might best have let Art speak for itself, without any preferences being cast for this or that artist or artwork.

It is with regard to Beckett that Adorno is most enthusiastic, and, again whilst one can have no real means of gauging the effect of Beckett on audience's contemporaneous to him - apart from the reviews that exist, but which would have to be excavated from the difference in language and attitude prevalent at the time if we were to utilize them fully and fairly - one might throw that enthusiasm into question in light of what is pertinent today in an artistic sense:

In recent years it has been fashionable to accuse Samuel Beckett of simply repeating his basic idea; he exposed himself to this accusation in a provocative fashion. In this his consciousness was correct that the need form progress is inextricable from its impossibility. The gesture of walking in place at the end of *Godot*, which is the fundamental motif of the whole of his work, reacts precisely to this situation. Without exception his response is violent. His work is the extrapolation of a negative *καιρός* [turning]. The fulfilled moment reverses into perpetual repetition that converges with desolation.<sup>82</sup>

If Beckett's basic idea seemed too oft repeated at the time of Adorno's writing *AT*, it is possible to ruminate that it is with a mixture of great tiredness and bemusement, admixed, at times, with scholarly curiosity, but one that is well-worn, that the audience now look upon the same wretched old lines, the sparseness of stage decoration and the reminders that - the banal existential motif - 'life is futile', that such a meagerness of production bestows upon itself, however well written the scripts ultimately may be. This, to be sure, is partly due to the exposure that the public has had to Beckett, refracted through the culture industry and though Fine Art video and performance. The lead character in the

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p34

hugely popular US T.V. series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, says of another, perpetually late character, in an episode entitled '*Enemies*', 'The girl makes Godot look punctual'. Whilst one can assume many of the viewing public got the joke, it may have been scholars of Beckett and Adorno alike that, though not quite shuddering, were most stirred by the, perhaps painful, irony of the reference. It could be argued that the familiarity with which Beckett is met, even if it be a false one, renders the work incapable of effecting the shudder.

It is here that one might concede that Adorno really did refer to the 'truly new' when favouring artworks and that Beckett's work is just too old now. This then would justify Adorno's own favouring of artists who he argued could evoke the shudder and who completed the specifically mentioned works prior to when he referred to them in a time span greater in passing than has elapsed between the first performance of *Waiting for Godot* and *now* (Mahler's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony, for example, was written in 1910-11, 49 years earlier than the first German publication of Adorno's '*Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*', *Waiting for Godot* was performed first in 1953, at present 58 years ago), only if it were considered that *ratio*, and its attendant socio-economic forms, had specifically moved so fast in its process of identification and in rendering that process all encompassing, between Adorno last putting pen to paper in 1969, and now, as to actually render the works he believed to capable of eliciting the shudder, as useless for the cause.

While this might imply that one need to actually refer to works that are truly new now in order to ascertain if the shudder is possible, it might just as much imply that the process of *ratio*, and identification, have merely effaced the opportunity to counter them, for their efficacy. Taking into account the theorem that it is the shudder that brings forth the new and not the new that brings forth the shudder, one might take the latter to be true, the truly 'new' existing in any case only in that the shudder itself exists. However, this would be to make a sweeping judgment based on the assessment of just one work (Beckett's



Waiting for Godot). Though such an undertaking does, at the least, point to the trepidation with which individual works and artists must be approached: there is nothing scientific in aesthetic judgment *per se* - though it can be proven to exist - and this is why pains should be taken when making claims for Art, if only to avoid the ire of those, such as Brassier, who claim rigorously that their philosophy *is* grounded in science.

One might argue in any case, that right now Beckett does not evoke the shudder, at least not for this one commentator, though this now raises the question of whether the shudder need be universal as an experience in the face of a given artwork. For on top of wondering whether the shudder is possible now, it is necessary to ask for whom it might be possible.

---Universality: A Personal Matter---

So, to diverge briefly: 'Universality' poses two opposite yet identical problems for Adorno, both relating to a charge of elitism that might be made against him. In the first instance, if the shudder were argued to be a universal experience, Adorno could be rebuked for choosing examples of artworks through which the shudder may be experienced, that reside in the 'high art' category, and dismissing works that are culture industry products (such as Hollywood films and pop music productions). If the experience of shudder in face of Schoenberg's '*Erwartung*' might then universally convey the shudder, and those in the culture industry category do not, then it requires of a person that they be monied enough to afford seats at the Opera in the first place (this being as true when the 'Philosophy of New Music' was written as it is today). If, though, the shudder was not argued to be universal as an experience, but one only open to those capable of eliciting it from certain forms of Art, then the charge of elitism could be equally bought, as a kind of pure cultural elitism - an experience open only to the culturally educated or able.

Here it is tempting to apply a Kantian argument to the problem, and paint in the shudder as a sort of surrogate of the Kantian formulation of beauty, seen as a universally perceivable experience. However, this would be to foot the whole issue surrounding Adorno's elitism to Kant's account, rather than to excuse Adorno of elitism, the former's theory garnering criticism by association: even natural beauty is foreclosed to many people, often on account of financial and mobility issues - not everyone can find the time for a stroll in the deepest countryside. Though, to be fair, to claim that everyone is capable of seeing beauty in the same way - i.e. *as beauty* - does not, as it may seem, ignore the socialization inherent in our individual reading of, for example, nature; yes, for many people the world-over there is little of worth that doesn't put food on the table. In an industrial era, that often means that nature makes way for the man made. However, this doesn't cast the universality of beauty in doubt, it just means that 'usefulness' becomes a prime motivator as regards questions of taste: the highest judgment of taste, that regarding the beautiful may reach mutual accord amongst all people, it is just that those on higher incomes may find themselves able to enjoy that beauty where others can't. The uncomfortable thing about shifting criticism's regarding Adorno's elitism to Kant in this way resides in the fact that it is arguably fully plausible that a person on any income could enjoy - without getting stuck here in the wherewithals of inner city deprivation - for example, a starry sky, a tree blossoming, and so on.<sup>83</sup> If they cannot, it may be just that humanity has come so far in subjugating nature as to make such a possibility increasingly difficult for the subject, despite Kant having located the experience of beauty in the cognitive faculties of that subject. As regards Art, and particularly the artists which Adorno favours, it is clear that many persons are not in a

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<sup>83</sup>This is, of course, incredibly simplified and is an issue that ought to be given over to another study - one more sociologically oriented - being that there are so many factors of cultural influence aside from income that could affect one's predilection to shudder, or not, as the case may be, in front of a modern artwork. It is, in any case, to the wider structure of society, and its tendency towards identification that one must look in addressing the issue of universality, rather than what could otherwise become an analysis of Class politics.

position to appreciate these 'great' works: they do not present themselves to one as a does a night sky, or even a thunder storm.

This is not to discount Kant's subjectivity. Whilst, for Kant, the experience of beauty occurs on the part of the subject, due to a failure of that subject in apprehending the beautiful object and cognizing it in such a way as to find a 'use' or 'purpose' for it, the problem that Adorno attempts to counter is the complete homogenization of life, which has come so far as to make any such anomalous an experience of the beautiful possible. Adorno's innovation is the reciprocity between subject and object aforementioned in this study. This effectively does for Universality and Particularity what has already been well documented here in relation to the subject and the object: the possibility of a Universal accord existing between humans - aside from the universality of the monetary cipher - is not abandoned altogether, but is, rather, shrouded in ambiguity. If Universality exists it must be a Universality felt on the part of the subject, as an individual. There need be no universal accord as regards which particular artwork evokes shudder, because the homogenization of society estranges the individual so much as to make the shudder necessary as a registering of this estrangement, in order that the subject can register its 'self' at all. The shudder is a realisation of the Particular inscription within the 'Universal' - the homogenized mass of society - as much as the linkedness of subject and object.

The shudder, experienced by a hypothetical reader of the *Odyssey*, cannot be experienced by the individual as in universal accord with all subjects, precisely because the shudder, as the moment of the subject's realisation of their linkedness with the object *is* the subject's realisation of its estrangement from the object, and this is due to the nature of reified existence. In a reified society, all subjects are so far estranged from one another, as to make them all objects to one another. The shudder, it follows, can therefore not be held as a unifying experience in the communitarian sense. This seems contradictory - with regard to earlier statements made regarding the subject's concatenation with nature -

to say the least, in that it infers that the moment of shudder effects an estrangement between the subject and object (or, indeed, between subject and subject). However, it would be more accurate to say that the artwork - in this case the 'Odyssey'- is the pivotal point for which the subject and the world at large experience their difference from one another: as an individual experience it is arguable that the 'new' is not an objective category, but rather is the category through which the object that the subject beholds becomes artwork, whilst the objectified subject becomes an individual 'living' subject.

Adorno indeed argues in *AT* that new artworks are 'hardly universally pleasing, and yet they cannot thereby be objectively disqualified as art', this being testament to the non-Universality of the shudder in that it hints at the non-Universality of what might be termed 'Art'.<sup>84</sup> This, indeed, pointing further to the folly of chalking up the value of Beckett, Mahler, Poe, *et al.* It is the 'Art' that for Adorno inhered in Beckett's work that needs shine like a beacon, not the work itself, which in any case shines only for those positioned to see it.

Now, to appropriate an earlier quote and to recap on findings thus far (here using the Edmond Jephcott translation, though the effect would be much the same if one were to use the John Cumming translation):

*The quote:*

The primeval world is secularised as the space he measures out; the old demons populate only the distant margins and islands of the civilized Mediterranean, retreating into the forms of rock and cave from which they had originally sprung in the face of primal dread [*Schauer*]. The adventures bestow names on each of these places and the names give rise to a rational overview of space. – *EJ*

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* p163

*Appropriation:*

*'The contemporary reified world is experienced as is - as the false separation of subject and object; scientific categorisation is itself identified and marginalised, becoming reduced to the cipher it truly is. Whence names were applied to objects, the artwork, as naming of the fallacy at large gives rise to the subject's connectedness with the object, as a truly rational overview of space.'*

The 'truly rational overview of space' now has the subject unified with the object only on account of the artwork (the moment of the shudder), with the disclaimer that the artwork is in fact merely that which is capable of achieving this very feat, using the word 'achieving' cautiously, as there is in fact nothing in the way of deliberate action on the part of the artwork in effecting the shudder, for the artwork, to allow one more twist of the plot, *is* the mere object which presents itself - again with no intention - as entwined with the subject, the portal through which the subject experiences itself as connected with wider objectivity.

If in its perpetual 'negative turning' the artwork offers hope only to later withdraw that hope, all that may be gleaned from it is the exemplary way in which the subject opens up to its opposite - the object. What can be gleaned is a momentary truth. How that truth might be sustained can be expressed with recourse to a further unraveling of that truth.

If, as argued earlier, the subject is related to the object then all beings must thus be connected. Once one has taken this to be the case it is possible to elaborate on the nature of the true connectedness of subject and object thus:

If one is to understand that the shudder is exemplary of the interconnectedness of all things, it is a connectedness that allows for variance within its form. In the sense that the

'möbius strip' - a mathematically conceived object which possesses only one surface, but that appears in three dimensional rendition to possess two sides - is a one sided object , seemingly with two surfaces, the interaction between man and nature could be seen as a continuously unfurling and repeating möbius strip.

As a möbius strip, it exists as a one sided two sided being (both 'subject' on the one hand *and* 'subject and object' on the other hand). This one sided-two sidedness is experienced perpetually by each individual subject, existing as separate from all other individuals, yet bound to them.

A mathematician confided  
That a Möbius strip is one-sided,  
And you'll get quite a laugh,  
If you cut one in half,  
For it stays in one piece when divided<sup>85</sup>

In consideration of the above, we can take the division (the cutting in half) to be the division between subject and object that stays together even though divided. The cutting is identification, and the staying in one piece is the realisation of the insubstantiality (falseness) of that cut - the always existent (but veiled) truth that Adorno's artwork exposes. This will be further explained in Chapter Three, with this division being constituted by the human sensory apparatus, which is objective yet also serves to unite the subjective world of the mind with the object that is wider nature. It is the claiming of this apparatus as art which constitutes the conceptual turn to which this study's title refers, as will be seen in Chapter Three.

If one is to understand that the shudder is exemplary of the interconnectedness of all things, it is a connectedness that allows for the 'life' of the 'subject'. In the sense that the

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.triz-journal.com/archives/2007/01/07/> 04/11/2007

möbius strip is a one sided object with two surfaces - from the perspective of the subject on first glance - the interaction between man and nature could be seen as a continuously unfurling and repeating möbius strip. As a möbius strip it exists as a one sided two sided being (both 'subject' *and* 'subject and object') and is duplicated perpetually in the experience of each individual, who exists as separate from all other individuals, all of who experience *alone* both their singularity and connectedness with the object.

For Adorno, this was in arguably the incisive role of shudder - its outlining of the illusory premises that we exist within, the imagined two sides of the strip, 'subject' and 'object', perpetually colliding in a complicity towards an existence that never really 'adds up'.

If each subject in its relation to the object (of which every other subject is a part) exists as what has been termed, in analogy, to be a möbius strip, both singular and at the same time part of nature, or object, and if each subject is an isolated re-rendering of this relationship it is now possible for each subject to acknowledge this truth in thought alone and in a way that cannot be administered, packaged and sold off, one would 'hope'. This notion of freedom alone constituting as much as Art could ever itself hope to - perhaps more, given the overwhelming commodification of art - with the subject performing the role of artist, a role which was for Adorno, only ever that of channeller:

If the tool has been called the extension of an arm, the artist could be called the extension of a tool, a tool for the transition from potentiality to actuality.<sup>86</sup>

So to recap, the shudder has been construed of as a coming into being of the new, insofar as the new is that which is distinguished from the reified and categorised. This shudder is felt by the subject in the presence of the artwork (the 'art object') as a realisation of its connectedness with the object. In the fleeting moment of shudder it is

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<sup>86</sup>Adorno T.W. *Ibid.*, p166

the artwork that comes into being as much as the subject, both being realised in that very moment as beyond mere objectivity.

*Schrecken*, a factor fundamental to the understanding of shudder, is a direct mimesis of the 'terror' that 'nature' presents. It, furthermore, *is* nature, being that the subject is essentially linked to the natural object; this constituting the undoing of mimesis as a ploy to evade the natural object, except when it is mimesis by the artwork of society, for such a mimesis exposes the underlying fallacy of rational society, as the artwork purports in any case to have no purpose (and so neither can society, of which it is mimetic).

The trouble with this formulation is, of course, that each aspect within it - the artwork, the subject and the concatenation of the subject within objectivity are all co-dependent for their existence upon one another: the shudder is the cipher of the new, and the 'new' is a byword for the artwork. The subject is meanwhile dependent on both the new and the artwork existing in order that the subject might come into existence. The subject must exist in order to perceive the artwork as other than a mere object, but at the same time the artwork cannot exist without a subject in order to perceive as 'Art': The whole formulation might be reduced to a 'house of cards' existent merely as a concept in the mind of the thinker, where each card is the 'foundation stone', the one card, one might imagine, upon which all 'cards' in the 'house' depend for their stability. Regarding the subject's concatenation within object-dom, and the universality there inferred, that universality is only as strong as the weakest link in the chain that the term 'concatenation' implies, a point Adorno alludes to in his study of Mahler when, speaking of the latter's late phase, he says: 'the general is so saturated with the particular that it is only through the particular that it can recover a compelling generality.'<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Adorno, T.W. *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, Chicago Press, 1996, p145



'Life is what shudders in the subject' becomes then a multi-layered promise - one backed up with letters of credit, that are themselves backed up with further letters of credit, a point that indicates just how far the relationship between art and life is mimetic of the structures underlying society, as - at the time of writing, 2008<sup>88</sup> - a world economy collapses much like the above mentioned proverbial house of cards might. Meaning is not predicated on a 'given' existent fact, as if one could find a 'holy grail' as evidence of the existence of purpose in life, just as the major economies of the world are no longer predicated on real gold reserves. If one traces back these 'letters of credit', in 'life' as with the economy, one finds no golden standard.

In this light it must just as well be stated that the shudder brings about 'death', in terms of a complete objectification, being that death is what *Schrecken* and shudder, in their constant circling, rescue life from, perpetually, but only momentarily. However it is a central tenet, possibly the most fundamental one, of this study to counter such an argument. Yes, death, as such, is inherent to life, yet life cannot be inherent to death, due to its final nature. In this sense, life is life and death, whereas death can only be mere 'death'. A 'life' that 'lives', is therefore one that can conceive of its concatenation within death (that of the subject's linkedness to the object), whilst appreciating its difference from the death that is purely 'dead'. Going on this notion, it makes sense semantically to refer to two states, life and death, on the one hand, as 'life', and death, as simply 'death', returning to the notion of the möbius strip, both one and two sided. This latter point overturns Brassier's more negative assertions as to the extinction of humankind addressed in the last chapter, whilst seeming to tally with his allusions to extinction being the catalyst of subjectivity (philosophy as the organon of extinction), which places Brassier closer to Adorno than he himself may like to admit.

Life's overriding sense is one of ambiguity; that between itself and death. Nevertheless, it is ambiguity that marks life, and not death that characterises life. This point will be

<sup>88</sup>And, again, when making revisions, in 2011.

returned to in Chapter Three, in relation to Meillassoux's theorem regarding the utter contingency of life, and the impossibility of there being presented a contradiction from within that contingency; i.e. the impossibility of their existing in a contingent Universe a contradictory element which posits itself as solid and unmoving in its ultimate essence. It will be argued that life, in its complicity with death, performs just this function. In a completely contingent Universe, life is an absolute that cannot be converted into its other, in part because it contains its other, though more than that, because death in the absence of life is not a negation of life, it is rather something completely ulterior to life. Life - that which is evoked by the shudder and which evidences the complicity of subject and object - is an absolute, and operates on account of a correlation between the subject's understanding of both the exterior object, plus the object (as a series of chemical impulses) that the subject's mind in actuality *is*. Such a correlation does not favour the subject, but does allow for a 'life' that 'lives' and that can no more be construed as a mere objective delusion on the part of the human brain that it can be seen as a fleeting and contingent irrelevance. Of course, it is both these things, when viewed with cold objectivity, and yet neither of them from the purview of the individual subject. It will become clear in Chapters Two and Three just how far Adorno's theory can be utilised as an effective rejoinder to the nihilising influence of 'Scientistic Philosophy'.

Returning to the point in hand, questions over whether life can be said to exist become reducible to the idle chit-chat of the stoner: The shudder, the moment at which things could be said to 'happen', to become momentarily 'other' than they normally are is the state after which one should enquire. This is the moment that the subject realises itself to be at one with the wider object, to itself be 'object', but it is at the same time the point at which the subject that makes that realisation momentarily becomes aware of its conscious ability to distinguish between subject and object. In this moment the particular - the subject - identifies the pervasiveness of generality (the object) and in so doing temporarily rescues itself. That it does this in the face of the artwork, comes about for

Adorno on account of the utter abstractness of the art form at its best, hence Adorno's preference for music, the most abstract of art forms, over all other forms. The abstraction of the artwork mimics the abstraction of the economy and of reified society at large, all things being at some point at least once abstracted from their real value, whether through scientific or monetary categorisation. As Jarvis argues:

This is the context of Adorno's account of the work of art as a 'fetish against commodity fetishism'. The work of art is an object which makes an illusory claim not merely to be valuable as a for-another but also as something in itself. In the language of Kantian ethics it claims a dignity rather than merely a price. It is the fact that this claim is illusory which allows Adorno to describe it as art's "fetish-character" [...] By persisting with its illusory claim to a non-exchangeable dignity, art resists the notion that the qualitatively incommensurable can be made qualitatively commensurable.<sup>89</sup>

One is left now with an irksome, but at least functional notion of precisely where the shudder emanates from, where the 'life' that 'lives' gets its 'liveliness'. The truth is that it doesn't, it is illusory, and it is precisely this that makes it both - as is argued throughout this study - more viable than any form of quasi-spiritual transcendentalism, in that it is materially grounded *and* more viable than scientific nihilism in that it allows for the 'life' that so clearly 'lives'. That 'life', is, of course, as much a 'death' as it is a living breathing 'jaunt' of an existence. Life inheres in death's shadow. Why then would it make any sense to claim that life 'lives'? The answer, in short, is that life living finds its justification in thought the moment one is threatened with the removal of that 'life'. Of course, under the terms of an absolute nihil, one grounded in scientific truth - on the basis that we are all, as humans, arguably mere base material interactions - such a statement carries with it an obscene ethical imperative. Can the fact that the subject appears to itself to 'live', and to seek to continue to 'live' provide a defence of 'life', and how does the illusory character of

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<sup>89</sup> Jarvis S. *Ibid.*, p117

the artwork reflect on such a question? Could, indeed, one not present as illusory the imperative to preserve 'life's' status?

To claim, philosophically speaking, that the subject 'lives' and that is not 'dead' indeed runs the risk of approaching 'wishful thinking'. Such a countering of scientific fact could be registered as the mere flapping of electric signals, the meeting of neurons, the jawing of sounds that pose as words in lecture halls dedicated to the study of a proper noun - 'Art', or, indeed, 'Life' - that is instituted as such, as a noun, as a meaningful existent 'thing', only in the vocabulary of the self same species that carries on flapping, bending, walking, jawing, in a wonderful 'mimesis' of what life might be like, if it existed.

One cannot deny, all the same, that life exists on these terms. To deny this fact borders on psychopathic - deluded, at the least - yet this is not what renders such a stance ineffective. The life that comes about on account of the shudder is one that acknowledges 'death as the otherness of the other'. As the subject is both 'subject and object', it must too be construed as both life and death, an ambiguity of the highest order. Again, life is 'life and death', and death is only 'death'. Accordingly, life could be said to be 'other' than death, and this study aims to defend and expand upon this notion as a matter of the utmost philosophical importance, a matter of life and death, no more, no less.

Though, again, in order for this 'life' to be possible at all, one should address the fact that society has come some way technologically, politically, societally, for good or bad, since Adorno last put pen to paper in 1969. For some, it is arguably the case that the utter abstraction of society has outstripped the abstraction of the artwork: Society can categorise and nullify the abstraction of the artwork, quicker than the artwork can evoke the shudder by exposing the nullity of society's false claim to be able to adequately categorise, explain and manage 'experience' *per se*. And if one is then left with no 'shudder', scientific nihilism must predominate: Life does not live, and any suggestion to

the contrary immediately takes on a quasi-spiritual complexion, thus making it unpalatable to all but the blindly faithful.

Thus for much of twentieth-century continental philosophy, from Heidegger and Derrida to Levinas and Adorno, the only conceivable alternative to the Scylla of idealism on one hand, whether transcendental or absolute, and the Charybdis of realism – which it seems is only ever ‘naïve’ – on the other, lies in using the resources of conceptualization against themselves in the hope of glimpsing some transcendent, non-conceptual exteriority.<sup>90</sup>

So argues Brassier, though it will be here argued that no such non-conceptual exteriority need be appealed to. What the artwork must indeed cast reflection upon is the value of the subject in its relation to the object; the non-conceptual kernel of non-identity becoming instead the mere disjunction between subject and object as a distinction between the subject's ambiguity and the objects singular difference to the subject; a factor which cannot be reconciled even in the subject's complicity with the object, yet one that is intrinsic to 'life'.<sup>91</sup>

Bernstein argues that:

Shudder, then, is the generation of distance and angle with respect to the other: Fearful awe is the affective 'spacing' of the other as at a 'distance' from us and as 'above' us. Height and distance represent the affective geometry of non-identity<sup>92</sup>

With 'fearful awe', 'distances', 'height', employed as terms in order to ratchet up the tension supposedly invoked by shudder, 'non-identity' becomes seemingly employed as

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<sup>90</sup> Brassier R. *Ibid.*, p129

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p129

<sup>92</sup> Bernstein J. *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, 1993, Polity Press, p. 223

some kind of Adornian cipher for the pompous mystique that a study into the true conditions of life often inevitably harbours, rather than being employed in the pursuit of truth. One can see in part what irks with Brassier (although his terminology is arguably equally grand). Yet beneath the posturing, Bernstein has it that the shudder is an acknowledgment, a realisation of the unsurpassable distance between what is - in this study - seen as 'subject and object' on the one hand, and merely 'object' on the other hand. What is here implied is simply that central to the notion of the subject's 'living' is the impossibility with which it will grasp both its own objectivity (as 'subject *and* object') and the objectivity of the object. The subject's true relation to the object is what is revealed by the object; that the true conditions of objectivity (and of the subject's particular conditions of existence, as the subject that is object) itself remains mysterious does not imply an element of the spiritual or mystical in Adorno's thought any more than the mysteries of the human brain, the Universe, or the depths of the Oceans suggest a spiritual bent appended to the sciences which probe these objects.

The subject that is 'alive' to 'think' in the first place is free to think itself to be 'alive'. If the subject can deal with the fact that it is as 'dead' as it is 'alive', whilst not being able to really know the state of 'death' (the object), it may be all the better for it; an entirely materially inscribed hope is hope, all the same.

Finding such a viable art form, capable of evoking shudder, seems as unlikely as it ever has been. Examples of artists - art being the medium via which such a hope might arguably manifest, due to its ostensible detachment from the world - who 'oppose' the wider objectifying social system, only to end up selling their work for six-figures abound. There is no need to 'name and shame' here, artists must eat, and starving in a garret would certainly be no effective opposition to capitalism. Though it could be argued that the works of such artists are not particularly significant, for if such works do not evoke shudder then life is not evoked. It so follows that both the art viewer and the artwork exist

merely as objects. Essentially, the artwork that does not 'shudder' cannot then be 'Art' in the sense that 'Art' evokes 'life'.

It follows further that if Art is to exist at all it must become completely 'other' to the objective and stagnant art form that now exists, that is mere object. In fact, if it be objectivity which the artwork need shed in order for it to effect the shudder, in order for it to be 'Art', then it may be argued that it is the 'object' that art need shed: where for Adorno it became necessary that the artwork became abstract, it may now be necessary for the artwork to become 'non-existent'. Hence, again, 'the conceptual turn'.

The artwork must not exist.

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Thus far Adorno's shudder has been construed, and to some extent appropriated, as a mechanism by which the subject becomes aware of its linkedness with objectivity - both as it is concatenated within nature, and in that the subject itself is materially construed - yet by which the subject may also resist calls for it to relinquish its otherness from the mere 'object', so that the subject may 'live' even in the face of Scientific forms of thought, which either reduce the subject to the status of object, or render it as secondary to the object in importance.

Such a scientific 'truth' in a sense plays up to dominant social forces that, whilst intent on gaining for the subject some kind of superiority over nature, succeed in objectifying it, by categorising it scientifically and subjecting it to the wider objectifying impulse of the monetary markets. The subject realises itself in the moment of shudder as 'at one' with the object. Yet simultaneously such a mechanism separates the subject out from the object in its realisation of its essential difference from that object on the grounds of its ability to

ascertain its linkedness with the object. It is this ruse which constitutes the earlier analogy with the Möbius strip, which comprises one material surface, but which presents as illusory two facades, a feat that Adorno credits the artwork with, but which it might be more fittingly presented like this: 'Art' is an impulse demonstrative of the ability of an object to present itself as somehow beyond its own base material make-up, one that can be found within artworks, but which casts an effect on the subject, that then apprehends the work, as that subject, confronted with the artwork is jilted into an awareness of its concatenation within objectivity. As an outsider looking in, as somehow 'other', as a 'subject' (life) that 'lives' in death's (the objects) midst.

Such fleeting presentations of awareness are not possible under conditions which prohibit the coming into being of 'Art', or, such that it is, a 'life' that 'lives'. For Adorno, Late Capitalism, with its drive towards homogenisation presented the possibility of life becoming entirely 'reified'. Indeed, it seems to be no exaggeration to posit that ratio, as scientific development, may soon become thoroughly entwined with the economic system in such a way as to entirely efface the possibility of any alternative purview being held over the object than that of the scientist's identificatory eagle eye, one appended to a body that would in any case report nothing out of the ordinary in its being reduced to mere object; 'Yes, we see it again, we *are* most definitely mere chemical traces, worthless, contingent, and ripe for manipulation by whomever possesses the power to make the most out of their fleeting few moments here.'

Of course, it is precisely beyond the scope of science to make such statements, yet that is exactly why one should proceed cautiously in an era when technological networks, which facilitate work, and thus survival, leave the subject singularly unable to invoke any radical moment of difference, anything that flies below or above the identificatory radar. Science's political silence lends it a political danger. Science equips politics, and, it



seems, philosophy, with ethical implications beyond its scope, yet so broad in actual scope as to beckon change, for better or for worse, for all subjects.

The Super-Panopticon, is therefore a warning of a physical correlate that runs alongside the scientific and philosophical impulse in rendering the subject as homogenized object. The fundamental and last field of debate then occurs over precisely where in the complex relationship between subject and object one might conceive of the subject as being able to constitute itself in and of itself, for if it is not possible for the subject to do so, it is entirely possible for the standard bearers of objectivity to render onto the subject what it itself is unwilling or unable to shift. Indeed, the most resounding and convincing argument against Scientistic Philosophy is not one regarding the actual status of the subject or object, but one regarding its ethical ineffectuality:

Once Meillassoux has purged his speculative materialism of any sort of causality he deprives it of any worldly historical purchase as well [...] Rather like his mentor Badiou, to the degree that Meillassoux insists upon the absolute disjunction of an Event from existing situations he deprives himself of any concretely mediated means of thinking, with and after Marx, the possible ways of changing such situations.<sup>93</sup>

It is not Meillassoux's sacrifice of causality, Brassier's sacrifice of life as such, or Harman's support of an object-oriented philosophy, that this study wishes to challenge, but the implications, rather, for the subject, thus construed - openly, or in absence of a consideration of the true ethical implications of their undertakings - by these theorists in light of their realist and materialist leanings.

This study essentially postulates that in a time when the freedom of the subject is threatened on myriad counts, philosophy sleeps. Does it play dead to evade its own

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<sup>93</sup>Hallward P., *Review; Quentin Meillassoux After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* Radical Philosophy, 152, 2008, pp51-57

capture? One can surmise that this would be a self-defeating ruse. If objectivity can no longer harbour 'life' then life must retreat to the safe keeping of the subject, albeit a subject that is aware of its base objectivity – a mechanism which Adorno's *Schauder*, here appropriated for the cause, allows for. Art (life) can only flourish as pure thought; as a radical form of conceptualism. It is this, as will be outlined in Chapter Three, which might allow for the subject even in the null void of 'existence' described in Chapter One, where life's rescue in the face of nullity ran up constantly against nihil's reductive auspices.

## Chapter Three

---Joan of Art: No Saving Grace---

Once Upon a Time ... A balcony at night. A man stands by a window, sharpening a razor. He looks to the sky and sees a cloud moving toward the full moon. As the cloud passes across the face of the moon, a razor blade slices through the eye of a young woman.<sup>94</sup>

In 1913 Duchamp placed an upturned bicycle fork, replete with wheel, on a stool, thus making a kind of banal 'mobile', unusual as an artwork in that the artist had made none of its major component parts, but had, rather, merely appropriated them. Yet Duchamp's '*Bottle Rack*' of 1914 was the first truly 'readymade' artwork, requiring an even greater leap of imagination, for whereas the bicycle wheel of 1913 at least entailed the coupling of one object - the fork and its wheel - with another, the stool, *Bottle Rack* required no such effort:

In 1914 I did the 'Bottle Rack'. I just bought it at the bazaar of the town hall... When I moved from the rue Saint-Hippolyte to leave for the United States, my sister and sister-in-law took everything out, threw it in the garbage, and said no more about it.<sup>95</sup>

If, following on Duchamp's gesture, any object can be declared to be 'Art', then it follows that so too can the 'Arche Fossil' mentioned in Chapter One - or the phenomenon signified by it - negating its absolute nullifying capacity. The subject thereby takes ownership of it, and sets it free, as 'Art', from its embeddedness within the null surface of

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<sup>94</sup> Bunuel L., Dali S. *Un Chien Andalou*, Faber and Faber, 1994.

<sup>95</sup> Cabanne P. *Dialogues With Marcel Duchamp*, De Capo Press, 1971, p47

the Shape of Nothingness, the boundless nullity of existence which the subject inhabits. The Arche Fossil, as proof of the existence of phenomena prior to the existence of cellular life becomes itself incorporated into the subjective realm: the Arche Fossil, as Art, is 'declared' by the subject, thus effecting a short circuiting of the scientific premise that there is an irrecoverable temporal gap between the subjective and the ancestral realm.

Yet, even so, the mind of the subject would remain essentially objective, as a series of chemical impulses existing on the plane of that 'Shape of Nothingness'. The task in this chapter remains the extrication of the deception that Art plays out, so that it no longer appears as a chemical blip in the minds of deluded objective beings. How does one make such a deception the condition of 'life', rather than a symptom of its impossibility? And how does one, further, extricate the subject from its objectification at the hands of a completely commodified society? This latter point poses a particular problem of a second order at a time when the artwork not only seems well and truly commodified, but when it appears as actively complicit with capitalism. Record sums of money change hands at art fairs year on year, whilst the common man struggles to keep the proverbial family home afloat, all the while paying taxes to prop up the investors who buy the artworks, which make them ever richer.

It is in sidestepping the gross complicity of Art with the financial markets and of the subject with objectivity that the notion of Art devoid of its object, raised in Chapter One, will be returned to so that Art might migrate to the only sphere of human creativity as yet to be commodified: thought.

Arguably, the subject, in evading the twin objectifying forces of capital and science, must self reflexively declare *itself* as 'Art', - '*life*' as such (via the 'shudder' as a revelatory revealing of the conditions of that existence), as explained in Chapter Two - yet only as an acknowledged deception free from the niggling return of nullifying objective 'fact'.

Indeed, the admission of deception from the offset means that the revelatory 'truth' of Art is in no way dismissible by 'rationality'. In keeping with Chapter Two's proclamation, 'the artwork must not exist', Art must be sundered from the object, but not merely so that it might evade objectification at the hands of the capitalist and scientific surveillance machine. Art must necessarily be sundered from the object, because objectivity (death, nothingness) is precisely what Art (life) seeks to evade in its deception. Artworks past and present can be seen as mere 'icons' which aspire to what Art might one day become, but which, in that aspiration, perpetually fail as objective remnants of what might have been if rationality hadn't so convincingly reified them at every juncture. The artwork has served varying ends, but has arguably always been to Art as the gilded religious icon is to the Ideal of God. Yet with the former, Art, there is no room for the hysterical countering of its truth by a Richard Dawkins-like character. The untruth of its revelations are prefigured in its message, for the semblance of life which Art feigns is precisely that - feigned - and as such does not aspire to otherworldly greatness.

All that is now left is to pull the rug from beneath Art itself, for if anything can be Art (re; Duchamp) and anyone can be an artist (re; Beuys) , there can be no 'Art' to speak of, for Art merely marks the conditions of 'life' that are already present, but which are not generally recognised to be so. For such conditions to be recognized permanently and by every subject is the grail which links aesthetics to politics as two fields closely entwined, yet sadly incapable of respecting each others potential promise. As Thierry De Duve argues in 'Kant After Duchamp': 'If the prophet speaks with the tone of the profane, then I am set free: he who just spoke of the anything-whatever could have been anyone whoever.'<sup>96</sup>

That the 'anything whatever' (anything can be art) might be uttered by 'whoever' spearheads at the end of 'Kant After Duchamp' a melancholic diatribe against anything

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<sup>96</sup> De Duve T. *Kant After Duchamp*, October, 1996, p368

and everything, as the 'Idea of communism' is mourned, and De Duve wishes that politics can pull off Art's exemplary trick of convincingly erecting symbols to what might be, if only humans could behave themselves better:

I guess I am trying to make sense of a century of political disasters and artistic breakthroughs. To a drill a hole in the wall and let the sun come in. I guess I am trying to understand why Marcel Duchamp was such a great artist.<sup>97</sup>

Such is the emotive nature of De Duve's wish that society, politics, life, might somehow be more, well, just more *like Art* at the moment in which Art becomes *more like everyday life* (i.e. more banal, more democratic). The difference between Art and politics is, however, that politics must enter into the world of praxis, of enacting policy decisions, whereas Art, even as the democratic notion of anything-whatever (any 'thing' as object) becoming *anyone whoever* (anyone as artist) remains aloof from the social order. How to parry Art's potential with the reality of life, whilst maintaining the necessity that the former remain detached (lest it otherwise become co-opted by capital), is a problem thoroughly explored by De Duve in *Kant After Duchamp*, as the impossibility of surmounting such an impasse is acknowledged as embedded in human nature. For, according to De Duve, 'humans are born prematurely':

Neoteny, the fact – long recognised by embryologists – that the human brain is not completed, and not completely “wired,” at the time of birth is what has given the cortex and the neo cortex their phylogenic prevalence over older (both in embryological and evolutionary terms) cerebral structures and has allowed the formidable development of the human intellectual capacities. It is this fact that makes the growth of young humans vulnerable and dependent on stimuli from the outer world, on the presence of language in their environment, on parental care and

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p462

affection, on social relations in general, and thus on culture, in a way that is not true for any other species, not even the primates.<sup>98</sup>

It is this apparently verifiable fact which, in De Duve's interpretation, spurs people on to justice, in their ever having to calculate ahead of their capacity, but also to repression, as a result of the insecurity arising from the 'lack' inherent in human calculation. That everyone is 'their own avant-garde' seeking out new territories, perpetually as each new generation inherits a fresh uncertainty, is the saving grace, in some respects, of humanity, but is also its failing, for if humanity is forever playing the 'advanced guard' it will never truly arrive anywhere. In this sense, as De Duve argues, Beuys' notion that 'we are all artists' is at best a mourning after what will never be. At worst, and at its most sincere such a statement is risible (more on this later). Yet the question over how to equate reality with political Ideals, acknowledge the gap in achieving those ideals, and yet still strive for a world reflective of them finds parallels with questions over how one might argue for the existence of the subject within the objective realm, despite objective reality. Though it must be acknowledged that the existence of the subject and the political freedom of the subject are two different things, even if it can be argued that the subject can never be politically free so long as it cannot be sundered from the object (the very reason that regime change or political revolution rarely accords with lasting qualitative change. Rather, the world gets less and less free in spite of all the best intentions).

Both the existence of the subject (for this study) and the existence of the subject as free (for De Duve) depend on an engagement with, respectively, physical and social objectivity. Yet such an engagement must meet with the facts of that existence - the objective reality of the subject, or the dependence of society on the objective facts of the individual human *being*, as maladapted for the purposes of the Ideal justice that it seeks after. Objective facts hinder progress towards freedom from the object *per se*, as from the social objectification of the subject (as stated in Chapter One, even if one is freed from

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p438

from metaphysical nullity, rationality and capital impose a nullity of second order). In short, without freedom of the subject from the object *as such* there is little to be gained in hankering after freedom of the subject from societal objectification.

As infuriating as these conditions are - representing the seeming impossibility of the transcendence of objectivity at meta and societal levels - the following formulation might be considered as evidence that there is little choice but to engage with them, for:

*To admit of our freedom when we are completely unfree (naivety) would jeopardize any chance of finding freedom, yet to think we are completely unfree when we are in fact free (paranoia) would render us unfree in any case. Finally, to think we are completely unfree when we are indeed completely unfree (resignation) would impede permanently any chance of achieving freedom. We are left only with the option of assuming we are completely unfree and feigning freedom in response, as a means of enabling a fight back against that same unfreedom, should the conditions ever arise.<sup>99</sup>*

This kind of wager is well known philosophically, yet replace the words 'freedom' with 'subjectivity' and 'unfree' with 'objective' and it becomes clear how closely linked are the causes of subjectivity *per se*, and the political freedom of the subject (i.e. political subjectivity, or 'freedom') in terms of the much sought after separation of what might be from what is:

*To admit of our subjectivity when we are completely objective (naivety) would jeopardize any chance of finding subjectivity, yet to think we are completely objective when we are in fact subjective (paranoia) would render us objective in any case. Finally, to think we are completely objective when we are indeed completely objective (resignation) would impede permanently any chance of achieving subjectivity. We are left only with the*

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<sup>99</sup> Precisely how the subject, may pass from being unfree to being free will be approached at this Chapter's end with recourse to Calvin's argument regarding salvation.



*option of assuming we are completely objective and feigning subjectivity in response, as a means of enabling a fight back against that same objectivity, should the conditions ever arise.*

In both cases the temptation is, and has historically been, to somehow marry the desired outcome (subjectivity, or subjective freedom) to the awkward reality of objectivity/social objectivity, or even, the not knowing of the extent of that objectivity, and to continue as if such an awkward fit were a necessary element of emancipation. This appears indeed to be the problem with politics as such: 'struggle' between competing forces has become an end in itself, as if that struggle guarantees subjective freedom in lieu of its actual existence aside from struggle. Hence political clashes are lauded by Badiou, Zizek, et al., even when they represents a costly impasse or a possible regression in terms of actual freedom. Struggle has become an end in itself, leaving the subject in stasis. Every proclaimed revolutionary victory or 'event' narrows to an acceptance of business as usual. Obama resembles his predecessor, despite his slick delivery. A promised revolutionary catalyst coming from North Africa falls prey to some highly pragmatic Western intervention. Yet every failure, leading to yet more struggle, is exemplified as an exoneration of the Leftist imperative to struggle. If you're not struggling, you're not doing it right, for struggle is apparently a prerequisite of liberty.

The aim here, one which may require that the reader suspend their disbelief at points, is to conceive of a subject that is free from the object, even as it remains beholden to it in fact, *without contradiction*. Such an ostensible freedom is intended as a measure against nihilistic cynicism as it threatens even a possible 'hope' for existential and social redemption. The intention is not, however, to present a political programme, but, rather, to posit Art as central to the bid for subjective freedom against overwhelming forces.

Art's aloofness alone can no longer be inverted as a sign of its elevated status and capability, not least as aloof detachment from societal concerns is in any case what the instruments of rationality promote so well (and here the parallels between political struggle and the intention to establish subjectivity as such are again clear, for in the Adornian conception it is rationality which objectifies both the subject and the social subject) . In reality, Art's particular aloofness from society makes it a perfect bedfellow for capital, a point not at odds with Adorno's notion of the 'absolute commodity' (see above, Chapter Two), for whilst Art's feigned absolute autonomy gives it its critical capacity, it is also what makes it attractive to the buyer. Such a status allows for Art's coexistence with capital in such a way as to ensure its continuance so that its deceptive capacity might one day be grasped and used against the latter. Though this process turns in on itself perpetually, as Art merely mimics the promise of the commodity, which always comes to nothing in the end. Art cannot therefore assure freedom, or even an existence for the subject as independent of the object, upon which it depends.

Art will not here be depicted as an innocent player, but an element approached in order to hopelessly feign life where it cannot otherwise be seen to exist. This feigning, however, *is life*, and indeed, it is less the case that Art will *one day* emancipate the subject, than that it might be called on to *perpetually* emancipate the subject, this perpetuation caused both by the failure of the subject to become emancipated in truth, and by the perpetuation of the rationalist project in its attempt to completely extinguish the subject. And yet, the subject does exist and is, as will be argued, crucial to existence as such, only in conjunction with 'Art' (i.e. the 'feigning' mentioned above).

---The Absolute Commodity Exchange---

Art has become a bulwark of capitalist endeavour, and this linkedness of the 'fine arts' to the markets - indeed, Art is frequently touted as *the* recession proof commodity - now

effaces Adorno's distinction between 'culture industry' products and 'high art' products, whilst the project of rationality *per se* raises question marks over the subject's ability to transcend absolute objectification, not least as the subject has come to realise and accept its base objectivity, a fact that which is by now a staple of popular science. Where Art was supposed to guarantee subjective freedom - even in a colloquial understanding Art, culture, is what makes us apparently different from animals - both Art and the subject have ceased to *be* in any meaningful way.

Duchamp's gesture - his proclamation of pre-made banal objects such as snow shovels, urinals and bottle racks as 'Art' - certainly fits into the accelerating 'logic' of capitalism in a way that cannot have been foreseen by Adorno. Whereas, in the marketplace - which is everywhere - the artwork is valued at  $X'XXX$  dollars, priced essentially in accordance with the profit that the same work might make for its owner in the coming years, for the readymade artist everything - potentially - is an artwork, thus unwittingly eliminating the speculative gambit which the art buyer performs as a feigning of informed reflection in an otherwise rigidly economically driven world. The art collector need only be rich enough to ensure that a given artwork (*anything*) can be ascribed and purchased for a high enough price as to ensure its further investment potential (i.e. if something is bought for \$100'000, it assuredly will have increased in value by \$XX'XXX in  $X$  years, whereas if it were purchased for \$100, it would be less likely to appreciate in value by the same percentage, if at all). Of course, investment potential resides also in the value of the name of the artist, and how that name fits within the wider canon of a history of Art purchases and investments. Yet when all it takes is for the artist to sign a banal object for that object to then rise innumerably in value, it is clear that the logic of the readymade is perfectly suited to investment. Those objects may be commissioned to order as 'artworks' by the artist (as with Andy Warhol, Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons; even Anselm Kiefer has a team of assistants who carry out the dirty work for him, such is the scale of his

production), or might even be made by the artist personally, yet this does not alter the rationale embodied in the readymade.

Indeed, the ruse performed apparently inadvertently by the 'readymade' artist is to take from the capitalist class its one remaining veil; that which attributes some kind of honourable element to wealth accumulation when linked to the collection of Art. Whereas Art was once seen as the sphere of purchase in which the appearance of tasteful decision making was projected upon the buyer (as opposed to, say, weapons collecting) the congruence of the notion that anything can be Art with the buying and selling of Art for solely investment purposes renders the Art purchase as the 'absolute capitalist exchange' ('ACE'<sup>100</sup>). Capitalism has its veil of cultured sophistication torn away, and Art is left with no refuge, because all there is *is* capital. The readymade, which seemingly bears a democratic aspect, has been crucial to the overthrow of the freedom which ostensibly inheres within 'Art'. Indeed, Art as 'absolute capitalist exchange' needs only readymades - a factory line supply of 'anything whatsoever', made by 'anyone whoever' - which can be accrued with minimum fuss, and sold for maximum profit. Given the above, it is hard to say whether the last laugh here is on the collector, who loses all the advantages of the artwork in a bid to own 'Art', or upon Art, which tricks the capitalist purchaser, but in any case falls prey to the purchase. For here the 'absolute capitalist exchange' marks the moment in which the 'absolute commodity' as the object which claims absolutely to stand aside from the capitalist exchange system feigns an exchange in which the money exchanged is ostensibly exonerated from the usual role that money plays, namely that of reducing and categorizing objects and subjects (as labour) to numerical values, in that what is bought ('Art') cannot be 'owned' or subsumed

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<sup>100</sup> Incidentally, 'ACE' is also the acronym for the Arts Council of England, and it must be noted that the practice of Arts Councils, in assuring some kind of social utility to Art by demanding that artists append some kind of education or rehabilitation programme to their Art projects in order that they get funding often results in Artists deliberately appropriating their methods to assure the success of grant applications. Far from representing the socially friendly face of Art, such a practice leads Artists to effectively 'hire out' disadvantaged or needy local groups, appending them to their projects in order to guarantee an investment, demonstrating that 'Art' is often at its most exploitative when it claims to be at its most socially engaged.

quantitatively. This last factor only spurs the bidding at auction for the purchase of what invariably disappoints *as Art*, for in the exchange Art is literally dis-appointed (un-appointed) from its lofty position of being somehow over and above the exchange. Yet, all the same, 'Art' itself is never at any point during the exchange actually owned. Rather, its moment passes, as the passing of the 'new' - the uncategorized, or un-objectified - into objectification, the 'death' of what briefly 'lived' in the subject.

The question ultimately resides over whether there is anything in this 'absolute capitalist exchange' - the sale of the readymade - which can resist outright objectification in a day and age when artworks are destined for such an exchange, often from their conception in the mind of the artist. For sure, there are artists who work secretly, away from the world, and who do not sell their works. Yet when such art 'hoards' are discovered the first thought that occurs to the media is how to get them on the market, the second, how to sell the film rights. One thinks here of Pordenone Montenari, the reclusive Italian painter who managed to keep his works secret for decades. It was the eventual sale of the house, upon which works had been skillfully daubed, which prompted outside interest, and an ensuing media frenzy. In such a situation, only if the works are poor quality will they be ignored, yet 'quality' here is deceptive, for what is 'quality' in any case, when the absolute capitalist exchange merely depends for its success upon the designation of *something* as 'Art' - and thereby as ostensibly free from the world of exchange. It is perhaps for this reason that the until-recently hermetically sealed artwork is a frequent bestseller at auction. Artworks found in attics and behind sofas, treated as junk shop detritus are always in demand. The fact that these works must be authenticated as Picasso's, Michelangelo's, Van Gogh's, and so on, does not counter in any way the above suggestion that it is the readymade that is the mode of absolute capitalist exchange. For what is the process whereby a work that has been forgotten about by the entire world, has its Master frenetically sought after, in order to authenticate that it is indeed 'Art', if not an instance of 'readymade' Art being 'made'? Such a point, far from being as academic as it may

seem on first reflection, in fact requires no art-conceptual awareness, for the man-in-the-street is as likely as the experienced auction house expert to declare that a given smattering of paint on canvas, stretched over wood, is or isn't 'Art'. Yet doubts evaporate upon the verification of a master's signature found upon the surface of a canvas that resided for decades in an attic beside moth eaten clothes, dirty old boots, cine films, boxes of books, numerous obsolete cables and jacks, and so on. And it is finding that signature that the (readymade) artwork is thereby made. Though what one might truly hope for is to find a conceptual artist in the attic, declaring *everything* to be 'Art'.

Indeed, the contemporary football-manager-art-collector is perhaps one of the principal beneficiaries of the open exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists to which Duchamp submitted his upturned urinal (*Fountain*, 1917) covertly, whilst he was on the committee of the same society. For at that point a chain was set in motion, a speeding up of what Art already was. For - as deception - Art could always be anything one wanted it to be just as anything can now be Art. Yet this phenomenon, the readymade, serves effectively to devalue Art in its seeming transcendent capacity, for the ease with which artworks can be made and sold, increases the desire to stake out artworks of the type that offer some very real, very clear kind of transcendent value. The newly rich can now revel in cultural sophistication, even if the words 'culture' and 'sophistication' have been divested of their meaning, and what normally passes for 'Art', accordingly, has become ever gaudier. Readymade (all or in part), sensational, and very expensive; these are the three elements that have marked out the best known works of the contemporary art market boom period, which has against all the odds yet to enter recession.<sup>101</sup>

To understand how the marketization of art might be circumvented, it is necessary to look at the readymade in depth, before continuing to consider the readymade in light of the formulation of Adorno's shudder laid out in Chapter Two.

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<sup>101</sup> That is, at the time of writing, in early 2010, long after worldwide recession had impacted most other markets.

---Fountain of You---

'*Fountain*' is seen as *the* seminal modern artwork, marking a greater methodical break with the past than any work that has come before or since. To recount the story of its creation, Duchamp proposed an open submission exhibition to the Society of Independent Artists in New York in 1917, in which - appropriating the sentiment of the *Salons de Refusés* held in Paris in 1863, in which works rejected by the Paris Salon were displayed - *all* works submitted would be shown. Seeking to test the limits of the open submission process which he himself devised, Duchamp then secretly submitted an upturned urinal, signed 'R. Mutt', to the exhibition committee, which he himself held a post on. The subsequent refusal of the piece by the majority of the committee played into Duchamp's hands, as he quietly resigned in protest (still not admitting to having submitted the piece), before convincing the famous photographer and associate of Duchamp, Alfred Stieglitz, to photograph the piece by this 'unknown maverick artist', 'R. Mutt'. That same photograph provides the famous image now associated with the advent of 'conceptualism', with its high-dramatic lights and darks, lending to the urinal the pathos of, for example, Michelangelo's *La Pieta* (1499), helped by a similarity in form between the works. Indeed, Stieglitz dubbed the work '*The Madonna, or Buddha, Of the Bathroom*' (it is in part this having been photographed by Stieglitz that makes people think immediately of *Fountain* over the earlier *Bottle Rack* when they think of the advent of the Readymade). But what is the essential difference between a work such as '*La Pieta*' and Duchamp's '*Fountain*'? And is it not their similarity which is more telling (a point which this study will shortly address)?

De Duve makes much of the photographing of *Fountain* by Stieglitz and the subsequent printing of that same photo in a *truly* 'open submission' journal entitled '*The Blind Man*' - edited by Duchamp and accomplices - , an act which thus developed on the provocation intended by Duchamp. Yet the act of photographing the piece looked as much backwards

as forward, portraying the urinal in the style of the tradition of Art from which it ostensibly departed. For undoubtedly, Stieglitz's photo appeals very much to the eye, evoking a sense of drama for the viewer as its lights and darks impart to the senses the auratic glow of the sacred onto the profane. This effect is exacerbated for the contemporary viewer, who is very unlikely to know that what they are looking at in the said picture is an upturned urinal, unless they are already aware of the canon that surrounds Duchamp's work, or have a grounding in historical urinal design! Indeed it is unlikely that a sizeable portion of the audience for the said photograph would have been able to immediately identify the nature of the pictured form, as a urinal, at any point historically. And in this sense the leap from artworks made in the usual way (sculpted, crafted or painted, following upon, or departing from age old techniques) and the readymade conceptual artwork does not appear to have been made cleanly. For just as early abstract experimenters, such as Kandinsky, struggled to free themselves from the human, animal, plant or mineral form, Duchamp's *Fountain* struggles not to be a sculpture, a point attested to by the hordes of tourists who look painstakingly at its form in the several museums in which it is housed in replica. For those viewers are often seeing the said work with the fresh eyes of those who first saw it, and who were at pains to understand it. Like so many things which are new or unknown, the temptation for the subject is to look at something under the aegis of what *is* understood. It takes training to see Duchamp's urinal *as just a urinal*, and then, again, to see it simultaneously as Art. And in that sense there is little democratic or inclusive in the readymade.

Yet this goes against the grain of academic thought regarding what precisely happened when Duchamp declared his urinal to be art (or, indeed, earlier, his *Bottle Rack*) for, as De Duve argues, the principle innovation heralded by Duchamp's adage that 'anything can be art' (a phrase that, in fact, has never been attributed to Duchamp, but which he has uniquely inspired to the extent that it has frequently been attributed to him<sup>102</sup>) is one that

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<sup>102</sup> It was George Maciunas who actually said 'Anything can be art'. I thank Patricia Bickers, editor of *Art Monthly*, for this observation. Duchamp emphasised the role of the artist in 'choosing', meaning he did not



replaces the Kantian universalization of beauty with a universalisation of 'Art', stripped of beauty:

Thesis. Art is not a concept; it is a proper name.

Antithesis. Art is a concept; it is the Idea of art as a proper name.<sup>103</sup>

Art, which was once the human expression of beauty, conveyed as the artist's natural and free flowing interpretation of nature becomes the designation of an object embodying the concept of Art as pure unconcerned Ideal. If Kant's notion of beauty represents purposiveness without a purpose, and Art gets as close to that experience as is humanly possible, conceptual Art represents purposiveness without purpose, *without beauty*.

What is surprising here is the way in which seemingly astute and ostensibly impartial aesthetic philosophers so easily give Art a further political role, expressed as: 'Art represents purposiveness without purpose, and this gives art a political capacity, due to its non-complicity with the economic and political realm (the latter realms characterised, as they are, by verifiable goal fulfillment)'. Bernstein's *Fate of Art*, Jameson's *Late Marxism* and De Duve's *Kant After Duchamp* all fall prey to such an assumption, tagged onto the ends of feasible studies like a saccharine sweet ending onto an otherwise poignant movie. Indeed it seems to be just such a sentiment which created a rift between Duchamp and Joseph Beuys.

For when Beuys famously declared that 'The silence of Marcel Duchamp is overrated', he effectively asked that the latter relinquish the privileged position of the artist, as the logical conclusion to the notion that 'anything can be Art', or rather, that everyone is an artist. In the absence of any such political wish on Duchamp's part, Beuys took it upon

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necessarily capitalise on the political (inclusive) possibilities of the readymade gesture, a point that will be discussed here later.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p321

himself to proclaim that 'we are all artists', a furtherance of the anti-hierarchizing potential of the readymade, here incorporating a clear Leftist vision. Yet it seems in so doing, something was lost, for the late 60s student movements with which Beuys associated his plea for the universalization of the artist's role inadvertently revealed, in the affected postures of protestors, that Art was something quite apart from the humdrum of everyday life, and that, therefore, most people really were *not artists*. At least not in the sense that, for example, Debord's revolutionary Situationists were artists, as they encouraged people, via their graffiti slogans, to give up work and to 'reclaim the beach beneath the pavement'. Indeed, the lack of understanding between the Communist Party in 1968 Paris, and the student movement who led the famed 68 uprising seems in part to accord with the huge gap between the facts of 'the daily grind' and the 'otherness' proposed by the Art-inspired student movement via actions and sloganeering.

Arguably, in fact, where Duchamp was incapable of shedding his facetiousness - wrong-footing admirers at every juncture, playing obscure word games, refusing to be drawn into political discussion, and claiming to give up Art for chess, while continuing work in secrecy - Beuys seemed incapable of shaking off the notion of Art as something 'other', transformative; a kind of pathological artistic seriousness admixed with a messiah complex. That is to say, for Beuys, we are all artists, so long as Beuys is the one artist visibly saying so, and so long as 'we' are convinced of the political import of his proclamation! For if we were all artists in the sense that Beuys intended then the constant parroting of the line 'we are all artists' would be as wasteful as the repeated declaration of the slogan 'we are all people'. It seems that Beuys either did not believe that we are all artists, or believed it, but wanted Art to be something different to what came naturally for most artists (people in general).

In his essay '*Joseph Beuys, or the Last of the Proletarians*' De Duve makes a similar point, arguing that Beuys's transposal of the word 'creativity', where Marx used 'labour',

and the universalization of the former belies a naivety: “Beuys is certainly not the first to give it this name, far from it. He is more like the last to be able to do it with conviction.” De Duve's solution is to evoke Andy Warhol “in counterpoint” to Beuys, so that such a juxtaposition - Warhol's submission of art to the principle of industrial consumption versus Beuys aestheticization of production - calls for a deepening of the understanding of Art in its relation to political economy. In this sense Beuys' militancy is too crude, whereas Duchamp's exemplary outlining of a space where such a thing as a pure concept of Art might somehow exist (as De Duve argues in *Kant After Duchamp*), allows by extension for a concept of democracy, untainted by the demands of reality, but accessible to reality as an exemplar. Though the folly in such thinking has already been outlined, in that the readymade arguably facilitates the takeover of Art by the markets.

Their personal whims aside, one may just as well ask Pope Benedict for an impartial analysis of the benefits of Christian prayer, as look to Duchamp and Beuys for an accurate analysis of the worth of their respective approaches. For, incredibly, both artists seemed not to want to honour the humble diktats of their own devising, which might otherwise have rendered both of them as mere one-time proclaimers of a truth which could then have been made anybody's to declare. Yet if the positions of the two artists are to find coherence it seems it would be one in keeping with De Duve's antithesis - again: 'Art is a concept; it is the Idea of art as a proper name' -, admixed with the notion that that proper name could be applied to anything, by anyone. In this sense, the Duchampian-Beuysian turn virtually eradicates Art, for taken to its final conclusion, anything, anywhere can be declared as Art by whoever. For whilst it can be granted that if anyone can be an artist, then everything can be Art, at least in lieu of being determined as such, it is this determining which is crucial, for that determination is the moment of Art, the moment in which the subject 'shudders' - according to the relation laid out in Chapter One - and brings forth life. It is at this point that it is necessary to inquire into how it is possible to declare anything, potentially, as 'Art', with anyone as an artist, whilst

maintaining whatever it is in Art that supposedly elevates it above the everyday object. In effect it is necessary to reconcile the way that Duchamp's urinal appears intuitively to be a continuation of past Art (with its transcendental promise towards beauty), with the creation of a radical schism with all that went before it. Why does one, against all reasoning, tend to look at *the Madonna of the Bathroom* as if one were looking at, for example, a Rembrandt? In asking this question it is hoped that the purely conceptual work - devoid of its object - can evoke the shudder by ascertaining what is common to all Art. Why is it possible to entertain the thought of Duchamp's *Fountain* and Michelangelo's *La Pieta* seamlessly as if comparing, to take an example, two red tulips of slightly different hues?

Whilst it is possible to ascertain by looking at 'old' artworks a certain continuity of intention with the modern period it would be foolish to try and trace some kind of art-historical lineage ascribing intentions to artists and artworks of the past. It might be more useful, rather, to draw an equivalence between *Fountain* and *La Pieta* by declaring them both to be 'readymades' *in this instance*. In so doing, both pieces remain artworks, but it is worth asking how they respectively become modified at the moment of being declared to be 'readymades' *now*?

In the case of *Fountain*, Duchamp's work effectively re-undergoes, in being declared as a readymade, its initial creation, yet now a question of authorship is raised, for the viewer is merely repeating an act that Duchamp undertook for the first time. Yet the same could be said in the case of *La Pieta*, which was prominently signed across the sash of Mary by the Michelangelo in a bid to correct those who wrongly attributed the piece to other artists (whereas Duchamp signed his urinal under a pseudonym to avoid identification). If, indeed, the creation of 'Art' resided only in a work's initial physical creation there would be little sense in signing a work, for whilst copies can be made of artworks, there is no risk that a work, as individual object, can be literally made anew in physical form,

*for it already exists*. Rather, the signing of a work, in order to identify or hide its provenance, acknowledges that *as Art* the work will be remade over and over by the viewer. The artist merely wishes that they are credited with the original creation or ‘discovery’ of the work, for which they may be recompensed *in lieu* of the amount of times that same work might further be declared as Art by others. This is clear if one thinks of the propensity for people to say ‘this is Art’, or ‘that *isn't* Art’ when confronted with something which pertains to be Art, to an extent and frequency unparalleled with other proper nouns (i.e. this is 'Religion', this is 'Sport', this isn't 'Politics'). It is the artist's job, their ‘bread and butter’, to elicit such a response.

In this respect Duchamp’s use of a pseudonym - R. Mutt - signaled his supreme confidence that *Fountain* would be recognized as an artwork, and this is quite in keeping with the gesture of signing which is undertaken by the amateur artist with a flurry, as if an act of bravado, for the act of signing is a gamble on the future reception of a work. In Duchamp’s case, the use of the pseudonym was a double bluff. He knew that he would eventually be sought out as the artist. Not so much a gamble, in fact, as the carefully choreographed plotting of the chess player.

What all this tells one about the artwork is that it is chosen only once by the artist, and that, following this, the work becomes the viewer’s to realize as ‘Art’. In this respect the equivalence drawn between both works – Duchamp's and Michelangelo's - by declaring them to be readymades, apart from infringing on the rights of the respective artists clarifies the ‘readymade’ as the functional mechanism by which Art comes about in the presence of a given object, as declared by the subject.

It could obviously be contested that Michelangelo painstakingly carved his work, whereas Duchamp merely ‘chose’ his urinal. However, Michelangelo himself arguably ‘merely’ chose from a range of possible biblical scenes in his portrayal of the dying

Christ, before choosing a block of marble, and ‘choosing’ how to carve it. For sure, considerable craft skill was employed in the creation of the work, yet the base intention was to turn cold lifeless marble stone into ‘Art’ whilst referring to available ‘stock’ (stories, figures, styles, all of which would have been informed by the demands of the time) in terms of formal portrayal.

To become momentarily anecdotal, Michelangelo once resisted a papal request that he carve new arms, legs and a head for the famous *Belvedere Torso*, arguing that the work, for him, was complete in itself. Yet the torso was at that point no longer the artwork that Apollinus, its sculptor, had intended, but a portion of the original work, reduced, in effect, to base object. Yet, for Michelangelo, or for the contemporary admirer, how many fragments would one need break the Belvedere Torso into before it stopped being 'Art' (2, 4, 8, 16? Or until it were ground to dust?). And at what point during its carving - as a human figure was slowly revealed, not reaching completion until the last chisel blow was struck - did the same work become 'Art' some nearly 1600 years prior to Michelangelo laying site upon it?

It is known that the slightest imperfection in his own carving would have been enough for Michelangelo to cast a piece aside. Assuming Michelangelo can only have expected the same attitude from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC sculptor Apollinus, who he greatly admired for his carving of the *Belvedere Torso* - made famous in part for Michelangelo’s admiration for it - it appears that Michelangelo felt himself capable of attributing the status of ‘artwork’ to something regardless of the supposed intentions of the original artist. In so doing, he effectively did what the artist, and art viewer (and, to be sure, there is no distinction to be made, in light of the argument here being set out) have always done. And herein resides the point of the comparison made between *Fountain* and *La Pieta* (which as works, only incidentally, have a similarity in overall form, recalling that *Fountain* was dubbed ‘*Madonna of the Bathroom*’ by Stieglitz) in their simultaneous and respective declaration

as readymade artworks: nothing radical is ventured in so doing, for had the Belvedere Torso been intact it would still have been down to Michelangelo, the Pope, his mother and his other (whoever, in short) to declare the work as 'Art', individually and independently when confronted with it. This, indeed, is the moment of shudder as described in Chapter Two: the shudder as felt in the presence of the artwork, enabling a sensation of the new, of 'life' coming into existence, as the realization of the subject's base objectivity in light of the otherness evoked by the art object for that subject.

To return to the question, 'how do the respective works become changed in the instance of being declared as readymades in relation to what they were immediately prior to being declared as readymades?', apart from having taken part in this experiment, it would have to be argued that nothing has changed with regard to *La Pietà* (1497-1499) or *Fountain* (1917), or with regard to *the Belvedere Torso* even (1<sup>st</sup> Century BC) at the point of being so declared. And in this respect it could be argued that the intentions of the artist have changed little over time, implying that a purely conceptual work may be able to illicit the shudder in the same way as a crafted work could in the past.

If conceptual art can be seen to have its roots in earlier art-forms, it should be possible to directly transpose the Adornian experience of the shudder in the face of the modern artwork, on to the experience of the purely conceptual Art gesture, devoid of the artwork, or art-object. In this case a short-circuit is bought into play, which effectively makes of the subject and its relation to the wider world an artwork. Rather than, than the artwork bringing the subject into play, the subject is merely bought into play, as artist and artwork, and, moreover, *as subject*. And whilst one may enquire as to why it took so long for the history of Art to reach the point at which anything can be declared to be Art - as to what kind of ignorance led artists to go to such pains to create Art when it could otherwise have been merely 'declared' - it is more accurate to say that it is we in the contemporary age who lack the ability to make artworks, for their commodification is

instant. The migration of art into the conceptual realm is not an advance as such but a necessity so that the marketization of Art might be circumvented. The biggest problem arguably posed by such a shift is the loss of contact between the subject and the artwork-as-object, which contains sedimented within it the historical conditions which have led to late capitalism. It is, Adorno argues, the entanglement of Art with these conditions, and its simultaneous claim to be autonomous from them, which transposes onto the subject its respective linkedness and ostensible freedom from the realm of objectivity.

If the purely conceptual work is to be able to illicit the same 'truth' for the subject, it will be necessary for the subject to make of itself the ostensibly free object which is truthfully both bound by and free from objectivity. In order to further explain this it is necessary to approach what has been discussed in Chapter Two, regarding the shudder, in relation to what has also thus far passed in Chapters One and Three.

To briefly summarise: The shudder was seen in Chapter Two as being a central operative element within Adorno's work, a mechanism through which the subject realizes its objectivity and its simultaneous subjectivity *as an object with a unique awareness of its objectivity*. The subject as object that is aware of its objectivity marks the zone of the 'life' that 'lives', in spite of the realm of objectivity (death) which that 'life' (subject) inhabits. It has been noted that where for Adorno this experience - the realization for the subject of its concatenation within but difference from the object - takes place in front of the truly new artwork, it could be said that the artwork is only truly 'new' when it brings about subjectivity, and that newness in this sense is an instance of life coming into being as a 'life that lives' rather than as a life that is 'merely' an objective delusion. In Chapter Two a difficulty was identified with respect to the possibility of the shudder arising in an advanced capitalist society, as the complete objectification of society arguably disarms the critical capacity of the 'new' artwork, the import of which resides in its ability to escape rationalization: that which is completely new cannot be rationalized, yet in a



society which is increasingly rationalized nothing can be 'new' in the sense of bringing about an awareness of subjectivity for the individual. For this reason it has been argued that Art, if it is to counter objectivity, must remove itself from the objective realm. Where Duchamp's readymade effectively withdrew from the artwork its lofty status as elevated above mere object, 'Art' itself is to now be removed from the 'artwork' altogether. Effectively the realm of production and consumption has become so all-encompassing that only thought can resist it.

Earlier, in Chapter One it was demonstrated that thought can effectively be reduced to mere objectivity in itself. Though it has been demonstrated that however far one goes in chalking up the absolute end limit of nihilism, 'life' continues to exist in some form, even as reducible to an element of the form of nihil itself, as an aspect of the Shape of Nothingness. For if nihil is to prevail it must be conceded that the nullity of existence allows for 'life' as inherent to its form. The question now is one over how a conceptual artwork, devoid of object, can be seen to evoke 'life' in the face of, firstly, its utter nullity, and secondly, the conditions which inhere within that nullity, which reduce even the meaningless objective interactions upon the Shape of Nothingness, including human interactions themselves, to mere objective reactions of a second order. In fact, here the sequence of argument followed thus far is inverted. It is not so much the case that whilst the objectivity of 'being' within the social whole, wherein we are all reduced by rationalism to mere matter might be overcome only for us to realize a nullity of a second order – i.e. that we are only in any case impressions upon a Shape of Nothingness - as it is the case that even if one can argue for human existence in spite of the Shape of Nothingness, it still remains the case that the sum achievement of humanity has been to in any case objectify itself as a reflection of the objectivity that nature first casts upon us as 'first nature'. In this sense the shudder is the realization of the subject's initial estrangement from nature, as a unique object which realizes its objectivity, and of its further estrangement as it attempts to overcome its objectivity through rationalization,

which results in a further objectification of itself as concatenated within the wider object. Using this analysis, taking first nature to be the fact of our non-existence, 'second nature' would mark the reduction of human interactions upon the surface of non-existence to a nothingness of a second order: that induced by the machinations of rationality, both as science, and as capital.

At this point it must be noted that these *are* the conditions of being, and as such that subjectivity will not be brought about by their reversal, because it is intrinsic to these conditions. Even if one contended the notion that the subject exists within the Shape of Nothingness, which in any case is merely a cipher for nature, it would not be possible to circumvent the objectivity of existence without recourse to some form of 'spirit', something otherworldly and beyond objectivity and subjectivity. Such a recourse would be inadequate to the task of opposing rationality and this is to say nothing of the existence of a spirit realm; such an opposition would be in any case akin to hypothetically employing a world class rugby player to take the crown from a world class show dog. Never the Twain shall meet is as much as needs be said. One must find another means of instituting the reality of subjectivity. For now, the task is one over how it might be possible to incorporate the reality of perception - passed from the sensory apparatus to the brain of the subject - as an experience of the subject-as-object in face of the object and somehow loop reality in on itself so that sensory experience can be said to exist on account of the subject. How might the subject claim, for example, the individual significance of personal retinal interactions with the objective world, such that vision is possible, whilst admitting of the retina's base objectivity?

In answering the above, it will be argued that the eye (as an example of sensory perception in general) is akin to a knife, which in slicing objective reality into two parts - objectivity as objectivity and objectivity as subjectivity - creates the life of the subject in such a way as to retroactively yet immediately put the knife which created the cut into the

hand of that same subject. The mind of the subject is the proverbial knife and the cut is the moment of shudder, realized via the conceptual artwork, as the notion of the subject's independent existence which, it will be argued, must be an art-conceptual statement, because only Art as a discipline can survive the reductionism of total objectivity, which, in its totality, demands a deception if it is to be circumvented. In this sense it is no way intended to say that Art is a saviour, but rather that any 'life' that survives absolute objectivity must be Art, as Art is the only discipline which allows for deception without undermining its foundations. Art has no debt to truth, whereas the practitioner of any other meta-genre must 'lie' to maintain the claim that the individual is free (or can be made 'free') in today's society, and in so doing exposes the weakness of their practice (religious, scientific, political or legal), which claims truth as fundamental to its being. 'We are all already artists' compromises 'Art' no more than the statement (as art) that 'we are all already free'. The latter is effectively a wager, which buys into the possibility of a currently foreclosed freedom arising at some point in the future, which is always *now*, in that the subject will never be more free than now, as unfreedom *is* its condition. To recap: to admit of our freedom when the subject is completely unfree (naivety) would jeopardize any chance of it finding freedom, yet to think that it is completely unfree when it is in fact free (paranoia) would render it unfree in any case. Finally, to think that it's completely unfree when it *is* indeed completely unfree (resignation) would impede permanently any chance of achieving freedom. The subject is left only with the option of assuming that it is completely unfree and then feigning freedom in response, as a means of enabling a fight back against that same unfreedom, should the conditions ever arise. The assumption of freedom is Art, and its 'work' is the subject, which is also the maker of that work.

This can be alternatively demonstrated by tracing the shudder and its effects in relation to the abstract modernist artwork that Adorno favours, and in relation to the work of Duchamp and Beuys, before considering 'Art' as a pure auto-gesture on the part of the

subject. The first consideration, the shudder as experienced through the modern artwork has already been covered. It marks the moment when the subject loses its footing in face of the un-categorisable novel art-object, which in its novelty throws the viewer back upon its realization of its true objectivity, and, simultaneously its realization of its being different from the objective realm. With relation to the Duchampian readymade this process, as already argued, does not change radically in complexion, what does happen, however, is that it becomes apparent that a leap of thought is required in order for Art to exist. 'Art' does not reside in the production of artworks, or in the reception of laboured works, but in the relationship between the subject and the art-object, which have embedded in their material an element of the true conditions of existence regarding first nature (the concatenation of the subject within the object) and second nature (the nature of societal relations). Adorno argues:

That by which truth content is more than what is posited by artworks is their *methexis* in history and the determinate critique that they exercise through their form. History in artworks is not something made, and history alone frees the work from being merely something posited or manufactured: Truth content is not external to history but rather its crystallization in the works. Their unposited truth content is their name.<sup>104</sup>

Put simply, for Adorno artworks contain in sedimented form the real conditions of being; they report on what is. In a rare mention of anti-art, Adorno goes on to argue that:

If since early modernism art has absorbed art-alien objects that have been received without being fully transformed by its law of form, this has led mimesis in art to capitulate – to its antagonist. Art was compelled to this by social reality.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Adorno. T.W. 1997, p137

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

Effectively Adorno notes the incorporation of the art-alien object into the realm of Art as a concession to the impossibility of art breaking free from reality. This art-alien object arguably finds its apotheosis in the readymade, for what can be more art-alien than non-art, or 'mere' objects? Arguing that art cannot 'go beyond' society, Adorno indicates that only by identifying with what it is *not* can Art challenge society. The readymade in this sense is a capitulation to society which yet allows for its circumvention, via the ruse that any object can indeed be Art and so, to quote Adorno again, artworks 'heal the wound with the spear that inflicted it,' in that they, as readymades, reduce themselves to the purely objective, yet once more resist rationalization, as they have deception at their core and therefore point, in the clamour of investors to buy them, to the irrationality of financial investment.

The rationality of the numerical count, of capitalist investment is revealed as entirely irrational, whilst irrationality further resists the complete objectification of the subject, as lifeless, in that the subject is crucial to the deception that is Art, which effects an interruption in the conditions of being sufficient to argue for the existence of a 'life' that 'lives' - something other than the continuum of death, of objectivity. Yet even so, the artwork, the readymade has only restored 'life' by issuing the truth of its subservience to death (objectivity).

To wrest the subject from object, life from death, one could go a step further, as earlier suggested, and amalgamate the notion that everyone is an artist with the notion that anything is art, what one might call the 'Duchampian-Beuysian turn'. In so doing the subject, which is an artist in any case, regardless of whether it makes 'Art' in the conventional sense, short-circuits the usual gap between subject and object, which entails the subject coming into being as an anomaly embedded within 'first nature'. Its embeddedness is nothing unusual, it is an object amongst others, yet the realization of this - as knowledge of the conditions of existence - constitutes 'second nature', an

attempt by the subject to be freed from first nature, which mimics that nature in order to stave it (as objectivity, death) off, and consequently fails as mimesis reverts to first nature, and the objectivity of science reinforces the base objectivity of the subject. The subject, free of the ignorance of objectivity, of being object, realizes itself to indeed be objective in complexión. It thus becomes nothing but a basic monitoring system, an ‘eye’ in an eternal desert, a surveillance chip upon the surface of the Shape of Nothingness which relays a stream of consciousness to the empty subject, to no-body. However, under the conditions of the ‘Duchampian-Beuysian turn’, that eye, as the subject, is constituted as the point at which subjectivity comes about on its own account, staved off from the object, even in its dependence upon it. This occurs via the declaration of subjectivity, as ‘Art’ (the concept of freedom), and in this sense the impossibility of making genuine Art in an advanced capitalist society does not mark a loss for Art, but rather the apotheosis of Art which takes the notion of the absolute investment commodity, with the readymade as its product, to its extreme: the subject becomes ‘Art’, in a play on Odysseus’ cunning, as outlined in Chapter One. Yet here the point is not to evade capture at the hands of capital (the Sirens) by feigning anonymity (my name is ‘nobody’), but to feign one’s intrinsic value for freedom, for ‘life’ aside from objectivity. In this sense, even when caught within the auspices of the Super-Panopticon (as mentioned in Chapter Two), as a seamless surveillance network, a space can be leveraged for freedom, out of which genuine freedom can be sought.

Yet there is a danger here, for if everyone is an artist, and everything produced or even interacted with *is* Art it would arguably be possible to conclude that nothing is specifically ‘Art’, and that, rather, there exists a flat plane of life in which all human activities are all equally important in bringing about moments of life, fluctuations upon the Shape of Nothingness varied enough to constitute a lived existence of sorts. The tilling of the soil, the hoeing of the land, the stacking of shelves, entry of data, the purchase of products. Everyone can be free, if they believe. Only one senses immediately

a repugnant tendency towards an acceptance of the unacceptable aspects of capital on the part of the subject: The naïve interaction with products, gadgets and computer programmes meets with banal labour undertaken as a merely pesky physical prison to allow for those products to be consumed. All the while the human as 'free', as 'Art' becomes privileged, with no qualitative distinctions drawn between activities undertaken, a point that risks a collapse of all human activity back into the very objective nullity - as the reification of all activity - which the democratization of Art seeks to evade. For in reality, such a system, in which we are all artists by default, and in which all activities, as one's in which the subject enters a process of interaction, of the whittling and pacifying of objective material, merely render the subject as a kind of conscious tumbleweed, or even, being kind, as the force which moves the tumbleweed, a kind of hyper intelligent dung-beetle turning the Universe between its black spindly hind legs, in a realm in which intelligence itself is a mirage, a mere conglomerate of random interactions. Indeed, where Brassier argues that the whole of human existence might turn out to be a fly's waking nightmare, it might be further added that within the nightmare the fly wakes up to find that it is the said dung beetle. Effectively, the simple democratic notion that we are all already Artists and that everything is then Art, runs up against this very problem, for it reinstates what that very notion aims to escape: where first nature is evaded by the subject engaging as an artist with nature, and therefore transforming all objects into one's capable of eliciting the shudder, this higher level of being, as a kind of second nature, reduces the shudder to a kind of continual and therefore blunted experience, in fact, it can't happen, for the revelatory moment of 'Art' as an interruption of the continuum of objectivity is stolen by its absolute democratization. The dream of 'life' is reduced to the reality of it being dreamed by the artist, and the reality of the artist's objectivity, the final waking, onto nothingness.

Returning to 'Art', it must not be the case that the subject, that is 'already an Artist' is always already making Art. Rather, it is the case that the subject-that is-object *is* 'Art',

but is only occasionally and momentarily present as subject (rather than deluded object). That the subject *is* Art is the ultimate conclusion to be gleaned from the 'Duchampian-Beuysian turn' for the simple reason that, once the objective realm of production, this whittling down of objective material, has been dismissed - together with aforementioned dismissals of the art-object as an effective means of realizing subjectivity in a rational advanced capitalist society - auto designation of the subject as Art in the only recourse left, and this can only happen on the part of the subject as one amongst all subjects, who are all already artists. The reason for this may by now be apparent, though it is worth reiterating. The subject cannot be the subject that auto designates itself as Art, if Art be a category which can only be declared by Art experts, for if this was the case, following upon Duchamp, who refused to universalize the truth which the readymade has seemed always to point to, then Art would be a categorizing genre, the kind of which Art precisely seeks to evade. If Art is to be universalized it cannot be by an individual artist, *ala* Beuys, it must be universalized by each and every individual. To recap, a pure form of conceptualism is necessitated as the final refuge of Art - i.e. the 'conceptual turn' that gives this study its title - and this must therefore be undertaken as the declaration of the subject *as Art*, and must be undertaken individually. Put simply, Art is subjectivity. Pure conceptualism is not a ruse - though it must employ the ruse - but is, rather, the final refuge of Art *and* subjectivity. This can be clearly demonstrated if one considers what in this light becomes of the 'shudder'.

What is now necessary is a close examination of the shudder as it appears stripped bare of various art-theoretical inferences, for this will make it easier to make the above claim, not as a claim enamoured by or indebted to Art, but one for which Art is an intrinsic operative factor. To return to Adorno on the shudder:

Art is redemptive by the act in which the spirit in it throws itself away. Art holds true to the shudder, but not by regression to it. Rather, art is its legacy. The spirit of



artworks produces the shudder by externalizing it in objects. Thus art participates in the actual movement of history in accord with the law of Enlightenment: By virtue of the self-reflection of genius, what once seemed to be reality emigrates into imagination, where it survives by becoming conscious of its own unreality. The historical trajectory of art as spiritualization is of that of the critique of myth as well as that of its redemption: the imagination confirms the possibilities of what it recollects.

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In this formulation 'spirit' can be taken - in keeping with findings laid out here in Chapter Two - as a realization of the loss of spirit in the sense of 'spiritual otherness' (a 'life' in the subject which is irreducible to objectivity), and a momentary shock (as *Schrecken*) at the passing away of what might have been. The movement of history, further, can be seen as a sedimented and accumulated historical loss of that same spirit. This loss manifests as shudder via the artwork, which participates in the movement of history by recasting the moment at which the subject was demystified and simultaneously realised itself to be at one with the natural object. The artwork survives the attempt by rationality to then subjugate nature, or hide its pervasiveness, by play-acting at being removed from both first nature (our concatenation within nature itself) and second nature (rationality) and can only achieve this by remaining conscious of its illusory character, 'its own reality'. In this sense Art is the mirror which shows the subject to its inner reality whilst enabling a reflection on its existence as embedded within the outer reality of nature.

We have here several players; history, spirit, the object (nature), the subject, rationality (as second nature) and Art. To cast such an interaction as a play of equal characters upon the surface of the Shape of Nothingness: the subject, faced by 'Art' realizes that it *is* object (nature), thus recalling the subject's primordial realization and loss of 'spirit', a factor usually obscured by second nature.

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, p118

Now, if to this simple interaction we add another factor, and that is a secondary objectification, which renders both the realm of first and second nature, and everything within them, including Art and the subject as null, what might be indeed called a 'nullification', this interaction can be reconstrued as such:

The subject realizes that it is object (nature) in the face of Art, recalling its earlier similar realization and loss of 'spirit', a factor usually obscured by second nature. However, this capacity of recall is nullified, rendering everything null and seamlessly objective, as mere differences of form within the Shape of Nothingness. This nullity, as by now perhaps clear, presents two further opposing yet intertwined tendencies. The first is characterized by Art's divestment at the hands of capital and rationality, simultaneous to capital's ostensible exoneration, for its involvement with Art. The second can be seen as a potential freeing of Art in that what is captured by rationality cannot really be 'Art' in any case, making, in light of the first observation, capital the victim of the exchange, for every artwork sold is in this sense a 'fake': It is not Art if it can be sold. Though, paradoxically, it is the status of Art as absolute commodity (i.e. better than, freer than, a normal commodity) which guarantees its freedom from the categorizing tendency of capital.

As Adorno argues in *AT*:

If all art is the secularization of transcendence, it participates in the dialectic of enlightenment. Art has confronted this dialectic with the aesthetic conception of antiart; indeed, without this element art is no longer thinkable. This implies nothing less than art must go beyond its own concept in order to remain faithful to that concept. The idea of its abolition does it homage by honouring its claim to truth.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p29

Art's participation in the dialectic of enlightenment in other words implies its being embedded within the perpetual negative turning of rationality versus unfettered nature (see Chapter Two. Where Adorno goes on to speak of 'antiart' he refers to Art's tendency to favour the fleeting, for if newness is demanded of 'Art' so that it may exist at all (as uncategorized and therefore beyond rationalization), a conflict arises with Art's intrinsic commitment to endure. It is this dialectic, effectively the opposition of Art's transcendental reality, against its mundane reality which gives way to 'antiart':

The source of art's power of resistance is that a realized materialism would at the same time be the abolition of materialism, the abolition of the domination of material interests. In its powerlessness, art anticipates a spirit that would only then step forth. To this corresponds an objective need, the neediness of the world, which is contrary to the subjective and now no more than ideological individual need for art. Art can find its continuation nowhere else than in this objective need.<sup>108</sup>

What is implied is that Art, shorn of any sacred capacity, must find recourse to the world of things, not least as that is all there is; it is from there that any future possibility of transcendence must 'step forth'. Though not implicit, it is here suggested that the objectified reality of capital is essential and it is only by turning in on itself, as 'antiart', - as the artwork with a fleeting duration, that it can resist the objectified reality out of which it arises. It has to be fleeting, because if it remained autonomous from the world permanently, it would no longer be able to appear to the world in any case. The problem is that today capital arguably goes ahead of the fleeting art gesture, anticipating it and buying it before it has been declared. Or rather, art is declared before being made, thus defusing its novel aspect, something seen clearly in the manufacture of bands, declared as 'music' by the mean average of the population via television polls before they release any original music. The Fine Arts sees a parallel in the yearly ritual whereby collectors buy up wholesale the works of promising art graduates. Undergraduates are now taught how

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

to appeal to these collectors as a fundamental skill of the artist. Where, along the line, did the actual 'Art' go?

The challenge, in maintaining the objectivity of which Art is a part is to conceive of a form of conceptualism which can exist as both unabashedly entwined with the object and as separate from it. The subject need take ownership of its sensory apparatus and declare it as an inseparable element of subjectivity, simultaneous to the art-conceptual proclamation of freedom from the object.

To better explain how this process might function it is necessary to return to a consideration of Duchamp, in relation to the 'retinal'.

---Retina of Experience---

Speaking of two of his better known works – 'The Box' and 'The Large Glass' - Duchamp tells his interviewer:

Duchamp: "I didn't have the idea of a box as much as just notes. I thought I could collect in an album like the Saint-Etienne catalogue, some calculations, some reflections [...] I wanted them to go with the 'Glass', and to be consulted when seeing the 'Glass' because, as I see it, it must not be 'looked at' in the aesthetic sense of the word. One must consult the book and see the two together. The conjunction of the two things entirely removes the retinal aspect I don't like. It was very logical.

Cabanne: Where does your anti-retinal attitude come from?

Duchamp: From too great an importance given to the retinal. Since Courbet it's believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error. The retinal

shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral. If I had the chance to take an antiretinal attitude, it unfortunately hasn't changed much; our whole century is completely retinal, except for the surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat. And still, they didn't go so far! In spite of the fact Breton says he believes in judging from a surrealist point of view, down deep he's still really interested in painting in a retinal sense. It's absolutely ridiculous. It has to change; it hasn't always been like this.<sup>109</sup>

For Duchamp, the 'retinal' constitutes that which appeals purely sensuously to the eye and which does not bear a deepening intellectual aspect upon reflection, a point which is closely linked to Duchamp's attempted eradication of the taste judgment from his artistic practice, by means of incorporating randomness, as famously with his '*Three Standard Stoppages*' (1913), in which the artist dropped three pieces of string measuring one metre in length from a height of one metre on to three canvases, before fixing with glue the positions in which the three pieces fell, and then cutting around the forms, in order to make three 'metre' measures which have no use value as rules. As Duchamp himself put it:

“If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane twisting as *it pleases*[it] creates a new image of the unit of length.”<sup>110</sup>

Both rationality (the standardized 'metre' rule) and the retinal are apparently disregarded, beckoning a kind of reflective thought upon the artwork which does not, apparently, accord with a final judgment of taste. Indeed, Duchamp's choice of readymades bore ostensibly no aesthetic bias.<sup>111</sup> Of course, the implausibility of such a notion must be noted; indeed, Duchamp's clear dedication to the principle that anything

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<sup>109</sup> Cabanne P. *Ibid.*, p43

<sup>110</sup> [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=78990](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78990)

<sup>111</sup> Cabanne P. *Ibid.*, p47

can be Art, rather than that *everything* can be (or *is*) Art, points to a duplicity on the part of the artist. Duchamp comes across very clearly as having established an exclusive and secretive art-club of one; himself as custodian of a conception of 'Art' which adhered to impossible and opaque criteria. An opacity which arguably served to prevent the free and democratic dissemination of the notion of anything being Art, placing Duchamp as the high priest of an esoteric practice:

In general I had to beware of its 'look'. It's very difficult to choose an object because, at the end of fifteen days you begin to like it or to hate it. You have to approach something with an indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymades is always based on visual indifference and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste.<sup>112</sup>

Whilst Duchamp's methods here seem to be less detached than he would care to admit (veering, against his admission, into the less than arbitrary, not least as the non-aesthetic judgment as to the relative merits of one object over another must at some point deal with preferences of one sort or another), what is signaled is a desire to move away from retinal concerns.

Duchamp's work marked, however unconvincingly at times, a move towards the cognitive, and though for Duchamp such a move never bore a political aspect, the following exchange signals the extent to which it marked a move at odds with the art market:

Cabanne: Your [anti-retinal] position was considered exemplary, but was hardly followed.

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p48

Duchamp: Why would you follow it? You can't make money with it.<sup>113</sup>

And indeed, that which is purely retinal does have a tendency towards objectification, both of the viewer and of 'Art', as the stultifying capacity of Impressionist painting - which was quite deliberately composed to appeal to the retina – attests. Indeed it was no coincidence that many of the most respected Impressionist works came to adorn hotel foyers - or, indeed, the lids of biscuit tins, in reproduction. Paintings rendered with the intention of precisely recalling the way in which nature appeals to the subject's tools of perception as sensual 'impressions' find a place alongside '*muzak*', in shopping malls, in restaurants and in doctor's surgeries, places where acute conceptual awareness is discouraged.

However, the shrewd knowing smugness of the conceptual artist and of conceptual art - free from judgments of taste, free from the judgment of the market - would also fall short, as, by the 1960s Duchamp was engaged in making multiple replicas of his early works to sell the world over.

As Adorno argues:

In the administered world neutralization is universal. Surrealism began as a protest at the fetishization of art as an isolated realm, yet as art, which after all surrealism also was, it was forced beyond the pure form of protest. Painters for whom the quality of *peinture* was not an issue, as it was for André Masson, struck a balance between scandal and social reception. Ultimately, Salvador Dali became an exalted society painter... Thus the false afterlife of surrealism was established. Modern tendencies in which irrupting shock laden contents [*Inhalte*] demolish the law of form, are

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p43

predestined to make peace with the world, which gives a cosy reception to unsublimated material as soon as the thorn is removed.<sup>114</sup>

And just such a peace has arguably also been made by readymade Art which, like Surrealism (which, indeed, often employed the readymade), aimed at going beyond the aesthetic, only to become the focal point of aesthetic desire the world over. Duchamp, indeed, appears as a barely less ridiculous figure than Dali, who has long been one of the most influential *and* most discredited artists of all time, not least for his courting of the markets as a grotesque Art superstar who came to embody little of the artistic rebellion he earlier claimed to represent. Sure enough, Salvador Dali remained eccentric, but not in such a way as to markedly question the social or art world status-quo. History may have been kinder to Duchamp, though it is clear that whatever Duchamp intentionally did, he cannot be given credit for his success any more than Dali can be held completely accountable for being the laughing stock of University art departments the world over. In any case, neither artist, and neither the Surrealist or Dadaist movements (both of which Duchamp was involved in) managed to shake off what Duchamp called the 'retinal' aspect of art. It was (and is) the retinal - and, by extension, the sensory in general - which bound their works to the wider world. The retinal, indeed, can be seen as a byword for the possibility of 'being' in the world of objects, it being the mechanism by which the world appears to the subject, visually speaking. Sure enough, Duchamp went some way to shifting the emphasis with regards to 'Art' from the sensual to the conceptual. Though the problem is that the mind, the brain, is so beholden to the sensory that nothing short of a self-reflective conceptual declaration on the part of the subject as to the retina itself - or rather the interaction between retina, world and brain - being 'Art' (i.e. thereby becoming a 'readymade', incorporated within the conceptual register) could hope to place the subject, and the artwork, outside what must, even under that circumstance, remain 'retinal'. Though even the 'Idea of Art' cannot escape sensuousness, assuming that it is not *a priori* and therefore must be party to the conditions of existence, as a material

<sup>114</sup> Adorno T.W. 1997, p229



'being', reliant on sensory stimulus. Indeed, this returns the discussion to how one might circumvent the obvious reliance of the subject on 'nature' (without which it would not *be*, under whatever circumstance) as an object outside of itself, highlighting precisely the problem with the 'retinal'; it soothes the subject into a false consciousness of the conditions of its being, as if reality can be 'processed' instantly, in a frame which the subject possesses, even as the subject is thwarted in its fundamentally being beholden to the object. All interactions with retinal art aim to repeat this process. In an advanced capitalist society, interactions between the subject and object occur so seamlessly as to both promise perpetually and defer infinitely a delivery from the closed confines of the objectivity of nature *and* of the subject (as embedded within nature). For conceptualism to break this tie it would have to take ownership of the retinal and turn it inside-out, as if retinal experience, and its interpretation by the brain, were the enabler of the life that the subject receives as impressions upon that very retina: A kind of loophole at the centre of the 'Shape of Nothingness' which makes present, via the subject, impressions upon its surface, which cannot exist aside from the subject. For the subject is the unique perceiver and interpreter of these impressions.

Otherwise explained, the retina is akin to a conventional 'one way mirror' - the type one sees in crime fighting serials - in that it enables the subject, as a law enforcement officer, residing on one side of the prank mirror to look out onto the natural world (in this analogy the villain), whilst remaining hidden from it. Though in this case the one way mirror is reflective on both its sides, in that nature simultaneously 'looks' into the subject, by transmitting its properties via light rays, from the closed off safety of its own side of the mirror, as if *it* were the law enforcement officer. All the while the reflective nature of the mirror, repeated impossibly on both its sides, shows both parties to themselves, so that what the subject *really* sees, in looking through the mirror onto nature, is itself as object-that-is-subject - a complex recording instrument. Whilst nature 'sees', in opening the subject up to nature, itself as the subject which is in any case

embedded within nature. Of course, this last observation turns the conventional notion of seeing on its head, for here seeing is not an entirely passive activity which the subject converts through a process of rationalization into factual data, but is an objective venturing out of object into subject, and subject-that-is-object into object, where both face their already being involved in the other, by way of the doubly-reflective surveillance mirror. It must be noted at this point that this coincidence of subject and object at no point resolves in a subjugation of one pole by the other, whereby all subjectivity is thought by the object, or all objectivity is thought by the subject. Rather, the subjective capacity for deception 'I am Art, I am free', which 'happens' in the moment of shudder, enables the subject to gain an ostensible lead over the object such that 'life' can be feigned. Yet it remains precisely a feigning.

Yet even taking into account the fallacy of subjectivity or - as it was earlier characterised here in Chapter Two - a 'life' that 'lives' as the subject looks 'out' from behind the retina, what is truly beyond the retina must remain opaque, in that all one can really know is that things appear as they do on account of the register of light frequencies that can be seen by the human eye and the way in which those frequencies are then interpreted by the brain. Similarly, the objective realm, which is transmitted by way of light and sound frequencies, is sealed off from the subject-as-object, no more able to signal its existence in reality as distinct from the subject, than the subject is able to claim its independence from the former. This is to say, that regardless of the necessity of subjectivity to experience, the independent existence of an objectivity beyond the grasp of the subject, and the independence of subjective experience, as markedly different from objective experience cannot be doubted.

The implications of this will now be further discussed.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> This is to interpret the physical reality of perception, but to speak at the level of day to day interaction, it is possible to return to the Super-Panopticon mentioned earlier in Chapter One, for the objective realm fostered by capitalism mimics the objectivity of nature in this respect. The surveillance network has become fully two way, like a retina which lets out all that it lets in. Recent disclosures from the whistle

In his 'On Vision and Colours' Schopenhauer describes the interaction of the subject with nature in the following way:

[Accordingly] we can consider each sensation as a modification of the sense of touch, or the ability to feel, which extends over the whole body. For the nerve substance (apart from the sympathetic system) is, without the slightest difference, one and the same throughout our entire body. When it receives such specifically different sensations - through the eye when stimulated by light, through the ear when stimulated by sound - then the cause is not the nerve substance itself, but only in the manner in which it is affected. But this sensation depends partly on the outside agent by which it is affected (light, sound, smell) and partly on the mechanism by which it is exposed to the impression of an agent, that is, the sense organ.<sup>116</sup>

We then have a subject cast as a complex system of instruments attached to a wider tissue - 'nerve substance' - which convert sensations into a experiences ripe for understanding and rationalisation. The capacity to 'see' is just one of these experiences, the discussion of the 'retina' here being exemplary of sensory perception in general, and could indeed be replaced by a consideration of the sense of taste, touch, smell, or hearing, with the retina being replaced respectively by taste buds, sensory perceptors, olfactory sensory neurons, or the tympanic membrane (of the 'ear drum'). The reference here principally to the

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blowing site WikiLeaks signal a new era in which there will be fluid movement through both sides of the surveillance mirror. The price will be complete subsumption of all subjects within the objective and objectifying system of surveillance, which will conversely have its benefits for freedom though not freedom as usually perceived, but a freedom of everything unto everything.

<sup>116</sup> It is acknowledged that Schopenhauer's philosophy in general is motivated by factors very different to those which motivate this study, though there are crossovers in that Schopenhauer credits aesthetic experience as being uniquely capable of transcending the cruel conditions of existence. It is principally the functioning of the nervous system, and particularly the retina as described by Schopenhauer in his aesthetic study with which this study now concerns itself.

retinal follows upon a particular move away from a visual to a conceptual artistic method as initiated by Duchamp, though the point here is not to privilege conceptualism as an inheritor of a specifically 'retinal' or visual tendency. Indeed, of John Cage's '4'33'' (1952), Salome Voegelin argues:

There is no doubt that '4'33'' is a seminal work and as important to the development of twentieth-century sound art and music as Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* [...] It brings silence, an extra musical sound concept, into the concert hall, and thereby asks comparable questions of musical materiality and its conventions of performance as Duchamp did in relation to the aesthetic content and exhibition of visual art works by bringing a urinal into the gallery space.<sup>117</sup>

Voegelin goes on to characterize Cage's piece in light of two innovations which can be equally applied to Duchamp's *Fountain*. The first considers Cage's 'composition' to be an examination of silence as a form within musical composition:

The silence of '4'33'' is a musical silence not a sonic silence. Cage's interest in silence lies in establishing every sound within the musical register. It does not invite a listening to sound as sound but to all sound as music. The framework of the concert hall guides the listener towards that aim.<sup>118</sup>

The performance of Cage's silent composition, when performed in the concert hall, apparently draws attention to the materials and environment associated with music, the frame which bestows the name 'music' on the non-musical, just as the work of Duchamp might be argued to credit the gallery space, and the canon of Art History, as bestowing the name 'Art' upon the chosen object, because it is within the context of the art

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<sup>117</sup> Voegelin S., 2010, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*, Continuum, p80

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

establishment, or within established canons of discourse, that Art apparently takes place. Yet as Art is ostensibly beyond rationalization and objectification it must surely resist definition. Indeed, a central issue for the success of this study is whether Art's being beyond rationalization is an element of Art as a 'canon', for if Art were a rigid 'canon' of principles and directives as to the possibility, location and instance of 'Art', it would become party to a 'rationale' of sorts and would thus be categorisable under the auspices of rationality. The question raised here is one over how Art's always being something 'other', something resistant to categorisation, can be maintained as a category, 'Art'. The solution to the problem can be found in Voegelin's later (second) observation of Cage's piece:

Such silence shifts the responsibility for production from the conventions of the composition/the artwork onto the individual audience member, who becomes audible to himself in the contingent context of his listening practice.<sup>119</sup>

Bearing this last point in mind, it is possible to treat of the 'retinal' purely as a cipher for the sensory in general, with all senses taken together forming what will be here termed as the 'Retina of Experience', where 'experience' is taken to be the fact of 'being', and the 'Retina' (capitalised as an umbrella term for collective sensory experience) makes experience possible as a grand receptor through which that experience manifests upon the Shape of Nothingness via the interaction of the subject with the object. In this case, 'conceptual art', the declaring of 'silence' as an artwork, throws the subject back upon itself (the audience member becoming audible to himself, as above) as an instance of sensory perception, or lack thereof, which reaches inside the subject and communicates its complicity with the object. The subject is witness to the silence of the artwork, which, of course, is never complete silence, for when all is completely silent, the subject hears the objective fact of the movement of its own heart as a thudding drumbeat, as a silence 'for' the subject. There is no 'silence' in a sealed off vacuum chamber, no more than there

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

can be a deafening roar in the same sealed off vacuum chamber. And here, to take the currently popular anti-correlationist stance - that objective facts demonstrably exist aside from the subject - would be to miss the point, for 'silence', and its opposite, noise, are categories of experience *for* the subject, which resists and converts the thoroughly null nature of the Shape of Nothingness by registering noise, silence, hot, cold, sweet, bitter, and so on, as individual facets of experience. The fact that scientists can then make instruments to demonstrate that silence - or some such other a category chosen by the scientist as subject - *would* exist in a vacuum chamber (or another place in which the human subject is not present, the Universe prior to the advent of cellular existence, for example) if a human *were to* listen in, does little to disprove the centrality of human existence to experience as we understand it. For sure, this argument has the potential to continually resound, for a Scientistic Philosopher might well point to the clear reality of 'things in themselves', such that if we leave a room to go to another briefly, we expect the room which we left, and to which we will return, to exist in the time span between leaving and returning. This much is clear, yet it does not damage the centrality of the subject to existence within the Shape of Nothingness, for after all, as here construed, no privileged status is accorded to the subject within this null form in any case. And in this sense the question, asked two paragraphs back, as to how Art resists categorization is one over how the subject resists objectification, for Art effectively marks the subject's listening to itself, its realization of its base objectivity as it records the movement of the body that sustains it. At that very moment there *is Art*, just as - for example - when stood in front of a master painting one might record the shift in perspective as landscape gives way to pure painted matter and the subject is thrown back upon itself as a mere sensory recording device deceived momentarily by artistry into losing itself in the work. It is the disjunction at that point between the art-object and the subject which evokes conscious subjectivity as the experience of the uncategorizable. It could not come about if the subject were initially given over entirely to the objective realm, and vice-versa. It is rather embedded within objectivity as a unique possessor of the tools for perceiving and

explaining that objective realm. This is principally why one should be suspicious of Scientific Philosophy in its courting of objectivity, for it undermines its very possibility, along with the possibility of experience *per se*.

What follows now is an attempt to further ground the nature of subjectivity such that its centrality to experience, but not existence, can be better grasped.

In order to better assess the nature of subjective experience in its relation to objective existence *per se* it will be helpful, for reasons that will become clear later, to momentarily focus on the example of two windowless rooms, chosen arbitrarily - the study, and the kitchen - imagined as they were the total extent of the Shape of Nothingness and that there existed nothing beyond these hypothetical spaces. Suppose firstly that these two rooms and their contents - books, a computer, a mobile phone, some pens, a toaster, a microwave, extractor fan, a strewn sock, an oven, various non-perishable foods, a fridge which is closed and which houses various perishable foods, and so on - are all that exists, with no beings, human or otherwise, occupying those rooms, or able to observe them from an outside viewpoint. It is irrelevant how a computer or strewn sock got to be in these rooms, or how such an enclosed world supports itself - for to ask such questions is to diverge from the spirit of the exercise - the fact is, that if this is all that exists, if this is the full extent of the Universe, then 'nothing' exists in a sense that is different from when one argues, as a nihilist, that nothing exists in the realm of everyday life as inhabited by the subject (i.e. life is null and the subject is a deluded void object). In the latter case, where the rooms are inhabited by the subject, the philosopher might argue that nothing exists in the sense that all activity is reducible to fluctuations of form in the Shape of Nothingness, with the subject merely comprising one form amongst others. In the former case, in which everything is static, and comprised of unthinking objective matter, there is no subject present to pass judgment even as to the nullity of existence. Who could argue that the difference here is not significant?

Repeat this exercise, but add to the contents of these rooms a human subject, behaving how one might expect a subject to. This subject studies in the study, and goes to make toast in the kitchen. At one point the subject huffs at the strewn sock laying around on the kitchen floor and places it on a chair. Yet one might again observe that if this is all that exists then still *nothing exists*, for though the subject is a complex mechanism which perceives the world around it, it does not grant to that world any special significance, in light of the objectivity of that subject. That said, it does register the existence of things uniquely and in a way that objects cannot, even in their relations with each other.

This is to say, as will be further explained, that whilst there would be no ‘experience’ to speak of, to philosophize about, without the subject thus construed, it is important to maintain that this does not privilege the subject. Certainly, there are human subjects that consider human existence to be a privilege over animal, mineral, or plant being, in light of what privilege means as word, and what that word then means to the subject who considers itself to be so privileged. Yet, objectively speaking, it is not possible to hold such privilege up to scrutiny, for even to argue that the subject is specifically *not* privileged supposes an objective criteria of privilege, which cannot exist, for it would require somehow equating subjective experience with the existence of objects and holding up these respective experiences to the scrutiny of an impartial measure, a process which in any case must privilege the scientist-subject in overseeing the objectivity of such criteria. The subject is not privileged *per se*, and the Scientific Philosopher is correct to treat with caution the slide of Post-Kantian thought into pure Idealism in respect of the subject’s centrality to all that exists, rather than to all that can be known *to the subject*.

However, the Retina of Experience, as the complex of subjective sensory perceptions filtered via differing receptors by the brain of the subject forms a hole in null reality,



through which 'life' - as subjectivity - enters, and it is this which gives form to everything known - so far as form is apprehended only by the subject - no less than form is given to those receptors by objective reality. Now, the Scientific Philosopher could counter this gleefully with recourse to the Arche Fossil - scientific evidence of physical activity prior to the existence of living forms in the Universe - as discussed here in Chapter One. The argument, as already recounted, is that the existence of physical forms prior to the existence of the subject proves that the subject is not necessary to existence. Yet it is not the point here to prove that the subject is necessary to existence - to *things existing* - and in any case all that the example of the Arche Fossil does is expand the above room scenario so that it extends out beyond the boundary of the kitchen and study, and back in time, to encompass the whole of the Universe now, and since its existence, and in so doing, as one goes back further and further in time, one reaches a point that precedes the existence of the subject, highlighting its superfluity to existence. It would, as Meillassoux argues, in any case be lame to argue that the Arche Fossil is construed only in conjunction with the scientist-subject as an impression conveyed to him by his scientific apparatus, or indeed, that successive subjects form a continuity between the past and the present through which information is passed on (as Meillassoux adequately demonstrates). Though it will here be argued that the reality of the Arche Fossil and the centrality of the subject to the former's existence can co-exist, in such a way that will enable the subject to represent a lacuna of 'life' - on the otherwise null surface of the Shape of Nothingness - which is resistant to the apparently objectifying shadow cast by the ancestral and antecedent statements issued by Brassier and Meillassoux. For whilst Meillassoux expands temporally the horizons of experience, observing that the challenge to the correlationist is cast differently than when one is asked to consider whether or not something exists when it is merely geographically off limits to the subject, one might ask why temporality itself should be treated as sacrosanct in a Universe that, according to Meillassoux is chaotically 'contingent' (i.e. reality is in flux and could potentially change fundamentally at any moment).

---To recap: The point of this digression is to account for the subject's centrality to experience, but not lordship over existence, which requires taking into account the existence of 'things' aside from those perceived by the subject, which itself can only come into being as an artistic gesture, i.e. via the feigning of its own existence.---

To return to the issue of temporality, it is necessary to visit Meillassoux's theory as set out in *After Finitude*:

Meillassoux identifies the contradiction inherent in the Arche Fossil, given that the objective fact that it indexes - as regards the existence of phenomena prior to the advent of subjectivity - requires that fact to be 'seen' by a remote subjective observer in order to be known to exist in any case. To solve this contradiction Meillassoux proposes that one thinks through the passage from a time existent without thought, prior to the advent of the subject, to a time existent for and registered by the subject. In so doing Meillassoux concludes that we must jettison the Fideistic model of philosophy in which nothing can be proven or known, and which therefore leads to extremist unreason as the only recourse for truth. Indeed, it is a politically motivated adversity to such systems which underlies Meillassoux's subsequent effort to overcome belief based systems by declaring that there *is* an absolute, but that that absolute is the absoluteness of contingency, with *anything* therefore being possible at any given moment, except for the overcoming of contingency itself. As Meillassoux argues, 'This is indeed a speculative thesis, since we are thinking an absolute, but it is not metaphysical, since we are not thinking any entity that would be absolute. The absolute is the impossibility of a necessary being'.<sup>120</sup>

For Meillassoux this does not solve the problem posed by the Arche Fossil, though it does outline the conditions of subjectivity:

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<sup>120</sup> Meillassoux Q. *After Finitude*, 2008, Continuum, p60

We can now claim to have passed through the correlationist circle – or at least to have broken through the wall erected by the latter, which separated thought from the great outdoors, the eternal in-itself, whose being is indifferent to whether or not it is thought. We now know the location of the narrow passage through which thought is able to exit from itself – it is through facticity, and through facticity alone, that we are able to make our way towards the absolute.<sup>121</sup>

That facticity, according to Meillassoux, is the absolute contingent nature of existence, which as 'factuality' provides the nature of being; that narrow passage through which thought exits, as an observation of the conditions of existence, which are presented as a necessity on the basis of factuality:

It is necessary that there be something rather than nothing because it is necessarily contingent that there is something rather than something else. The necessity of the contingency of the entity imposes the necessary existence of the contingent entity.<sup>122</sup>

Now, Meillassoux's text really asks a question rather than reaching an answer, and that question is as to how one might think the object in itself. For Meillassoux this problem must be mathematizable, although as touched upon in Chapter Two it is not clear how Meillassoux refutes beyond reproach the centrality of the subject to mathematically objective fact. Though for now it is enough to say that there is an underlying fault in the political basis of Meillassoux's argument, in which he argues that the absolute uncertainty bought about in Post-Kantian thought in light of the limits imposed on itself necessitates a lack of belief in 'facts' and therefore encourage a recourse to religious fundamentalism, and other irrational political and social phenomena, which cannot be questioned outright on the part of rationality. Of this situation Meillassoux says:

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p76

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

Scepticism with regard to the metaphysical absolute thereby legitimates *de jure* every variety whatsoever in belief in an absolute, the best as well as the worst. The destruction of the metaphysical rationalization of theology has resulted in a generalised becoming-religious of thought, viz., *in a fideism of belief whatsoever*.<sup>123</sup>

Meillassoux follows upon this statement by casting the religionizing of reason as contrary to the positive benefits conferred upon Judeo-Christianity by Greek thought, in which God is rationalized by the philosopher-subject as a necessary being, concluding that:

[...] if nothing absolute is thinkable, there is no reason why the worst forms of violence could not claim to have been sanctioned by a transcendence that is only accessible to the elect few.<sup>124</sup>

Yet the idea that the path to transcendence may be seen as being open to a transgression of ethical norms on the basis that the lack of reason inherent in fanatical argumentation may lead to violence sanctioned by an elect few, and presumably carried out by those unable to resist for having been brainwashed into compliance within the prevalent religious order, supposes the path of reason to be somehow less prone to sanctioning violence. Yet violence is sanctioned often precisely on the account of reason *against* fanaticism, whilst the victims of that violence are rarely the proponents of fanaticism or of violence, but ordinary people, who had they been raised elsewhere, by parents schooled in 'rational' thought, may well have subscribed to a rational viewpoint themselves (not that that would have made them necessarily less violent, or less liable to falling prey to violence).

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 47

Now more than ever the principle strain of Western democratic thought is involved on several fronts in the coercion of various people within Western society and outside of it into adopting the 'openness' of the West to its outsiders. Obscenely, the free West bans clothing items associated with religious expression, in the name of freedom, whilst instilling occupation forces in undemocratic countries, so that, - as Tony Blair once put it, whilst he was Prime Minister of Great Britain - they too will be able to protest freely just as the public of the free world were able to protest precisely against those same occupations. Indeed, for Adorno, it was precisely rationalism, or its negative flipside, which led to the worst excesses of capitalism, with organised religion indeed having been a model for the hierarchic system of capital, though this was, again for Adorno, as much due to the seed of rationality being embedded in religious and mythic forms, as to the irrationality of religion influencing rationality. Overall, it is the tendency of rationalisation toward domination, however scientifically rigorous that rationale may be, which must be challenged.

In fact, what Meillassoux misses here *vis-a-vis* the absolute and religion might otherwise be crucial to a consideration of the relationship between subject and object, or their correlation (as the perceived imperfect relationship between subject and object) and the reality of the Arche Fossil as an object in itself. For in Judeo-Christian religious forms, from Judaism to Islam, as with, indeed, in Hinduism, and even Buddhism, the 'absolute' is absolutely unknowable and in that sense the absurdity of religion is not the obscenity of those who know - who *truly* know something - but is arguably an obscene effort to reconcile with the absurdity of God, who, being unattainable by rational means, is therefore attainable only by irrational means, of which, to be sure, violence is all too often one of them. When violence is otherwise sanctioned by the religious leader, and it is not sanctioned as a means of rupturing rationality in order to get closer to the unknowable nature of 'God', it is most likely sanctioned for the same reasons as when it is sanctioned by the rational 'Western' democracy, and that is as a means of dominating and

acquiring resources and towards ever more control over nature, the object, the enemy. Yet this course of action is precisely an attempt to reconcile with the irrational (nature) through rationality, even as the latter masquerades as rationality. Second nature, as the human endeavor to overcome first nature, merely inherits the problems inherent in the former.

In any case, what Meillassoux attempts to salvage here by putting an end to dogmatic certainty through his reasoning of the prevalence of a virulent form of contingency misses its target, because surely precisely the insecurity felt by the God-fearing is one over the absolute uncertainty wrought by the existence of a completely unknowable God. When that absolute (as God) is further believed to implement a moral code decipherable by humans great injustices are carried out in his name. Given this, if that absolute *as an absolute contingency* were specifically said to consist of nothing but chaos one could not very well expect humanity to behave any more reasonably. Meillassoux ultimately should have resisted a call to the absolute (even absolute contingency) full stop. Rather than the innovation of a new absolute un-absoluteness (as contingency; anything goes, at any time) protected only by the facticity of that contingency, what the world needs now probably is an absolute, but one that knows that it is not an ultimate truth; that is, a feigned absolute. But more on that later. For shortly it will be possible to return to the issue which led to this digression. But only after addressing another strain in Meillassoux's thought which links to his characterisation of religion and the absolute.

*--- Note: The point of this digression has been to signal the irrationality of fundamentalism and the need to combat it with a further irrationality, but one that can claim irrationality as its basis with no recourse to a grounding factor (i.e. 'God' or Rationality). In this sense the objective stated on p205 - the 'attempt to further ground the nature of subjectivity such that its centrality to experience, but not existence, can be better grasped' - has passed via a consideration of the politico-spiritual subject, whose*

*rescue, it has been argued, is not dependent upon its sundering from a religious absolute, and its giving over to a mathematizable one, as Meillassoux would have it. This has been important, as the challenge to fundamentalism is the oft overlooked motivation for Meillassoux's challenge to correlationism, as - it is argued in After Finitude - the Copernican turn, in its admission that we can't really know anything, leaves open the door to fundamentalist creeds, which therefore cannot be refuted. Yet surely this excess of 'knowing' that characterises fundamentalism, and which is in fact born of the absolute inability of knowing the absolute would be better challenged by a willing unknowing than by yet more 'knowing'.*

*What is needed in defence of the subjectivity of the subject both in an ontological and political sense is an absolute affirmation of not knowing, which would thus disarm the monopolisation of truth by secular and religious fanaticisms, underscored by an appeal to basic statements of truth mimicked as Art-conceptual declarations. These truths could include existence of the subject and the subject's right to live a peaceful existence with access to work, free from discrimination, etc. That Art becomes radically conceptual is in any case necessary so that such a declaration is even possible, for otherwise Art - as something bought and sold - is too concatenated within the objectifying aspects of the market. This marks the 'conceptual turn': The necessary turn inwards of art into the realm of conceptuality - i.e. the 'concept' of Art-conceptualism - but also the claiming by the subject of its own subjectivity, as will be seen.*

To return to the point in hand (the grounding of subjectivity as central to experience). In a short essay published by Meillassoux in 'Collapse', volume IV<sup>125</sup>, the philosopher

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<sup>125</sup> Originally published in 2006. This idea is extended in his forthcoming 'Inexistence Divine', the contents of which will have been discussed prior to release in Harman's recently published 'Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making'. Note: this latter book was published as this study was being finally proofed, and as such can have no bearing on this thesis. Whilst there may reasonably be nuances in Meillassoux's thought as laid out in *Inexistence Divine* which exonerate him from some of the criticisms leveled here, this study addresses itself specifically to the texts discussed.

outlines his theory of 'Divine Inexistence'. Addressing the quandary faced by both by the Atheist (no final justice) and the God-believer (how can a God let this happen?) as regards the horror felt by the living over those poor souls who die in horrific circumstances without leaving opportunity to mediate over time the abject awfulness of their demise. A 'spectre' for Meillassoux is a dead person who has not been properly mourned and who haunts the living. Meillassoux responds to the question raised over what might constitute the '*spectre par excellence*':

A dead person whose death is such that we cannot mourn them. That is to say: a dead person for whom the work of mourning, the passage of time, proves inadequate for a tranquil bond between them and the living to be envisaged. A dead person the horror of whose death lays heavy not only upon their nearest and dearest, but upon all those who cross the path of their history.<sup>126</sup>

Meillassoux calls these dead souls '*Essential Spectres*' and goes on to describe '*Essential Mourning*':

We will call *essential mourning* the completion of mourning for essential spectres: that is to say the accomplishment of a living, rather than morbid, relation of the survivors to these terrible deaths. Essential mourning assumes the possibility of forming a vigilant bond with these departed which does not plunge us into the hopeless fear – itself mortifying – that we feel when faced with their end, but which, on the contrary, actively inserts their memory into the fabric of our existence. To accomplish essential mourning would mean: to live with essential spectres, thereby no longer to die with them. To make these spectres live rather than becoming, in hearing their voices, the mere shadow of a living being. The question which poses itself to us

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<sup>126</sup> Meillassoux Q. *Spectral Dilemma*. Collapse IV, 2006, p261



is thus the following: *is essential mourning possible – and if so, under what conditions?*

In a sense this question rebounds upon that addressed in Chapter One, asked by Adorno, over whether the conditions for 'life's' 'living' might be impossible following the horror of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, or, indeed, under the conditions of late Capital (which arguably spawned that horror), only Meillassoux draws a different conclusion from that which is still to be conclusively extrapolated in this study, but which was hinted at in Chapter One, re; the 'hope' to be found in its abject opposite through a deception delivered via the conceptual art statement. Meillassoux suggests that the only circumvention of a horror that otherwise points to either a meaningless and brutal existence, or to the existence of an evil God (as such, a '*meaningful*' and yet brutal existence), is to conceive of the possibility of there being no God now, but of a God one day coming into existence, in order to retroactively atone for horror.<sup>127</sup>

Firstly, in an immediate fashion, the divine inexistence signifies *the inexistence of the religious God*, but also the metaphysical God, supposed actually existent as Creator or Principle of the world. But the divine inexistence also signifies *the divine character of inexistence*: in other words, the fact that what remains still in a virtual state in present reality harbours the possibility of a God still to come, become innocent of the disasters of the world, and in which one might anticipate the power to accord to spectres something other than their death.<sup>128</sup>

This thesis again relies on the notion of a radical contingency, such that might bring about a God where one doesn't currently exist and yet inscribes, as a byproduct,

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<sup>127</sup> It is important to note that this essay was written prior to *After Finitude*, as was *L'Inexistence Divine* (1997), as discussed in a previous footnote.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, P268

temporality as a necessary condition for the coming into being of God. Yet temporality is intrinsic to the notion of causality which contingency seeks to overcome via an inversion of the principle of sufficient reason, so that, rather than, as the Post-Kantian would have it, setting the limits of understanding at the point at which phenomena are made known to the subject, one might think through, and beyond, the impossibility of knowing the conditions of things in the real world:

Why not, in other words, *absolutise* the failure of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, by maintaining that the meaning of that absence of reason for laws which we run up against in the Humean problem is not an incapacity of thought to discover such reasons, but a capacity of thought to intuit *a priori*, in the real itself, the effective absence of the reason of things as laws, and the possibility of their being modified at any moment?<sup>129</sup>

And here it will be shortly possible to return explicitly to the source of this digression - in the interest, again, that the subject's *centrality to experience, but not existence, can be better grasped* - for Meillassoux misses what could otherwise be fundamental to the radical contingency he proposes in inscribing temporality within it. This he does by arguing that 'spectral mourning' (mourning adequate to the most horrific death) *might* one day come about via the presence of a God who *could* someday exist, in the interest that spectral mourning be undertaken in a way that satisfies all - i.e. circumvents both the problematic evilness of a God who sanctioned terrible death, and the impossibility of grace being attained without a God - something that can only if the laws of the Universe are contingent, but are still party to temporal laws. Yet if existence *as is*, is radically contingent, what is time, but a measurement of itself as just one aspect, one object amongst others within a form of 'nothingness' - as hereby construed - that is radically chaotic? And in this sense, to wait for a conciliatory God to come about is as meaningless

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p273

as to issue proclamations as to the meaning (or lack thereof) of material phenomena existent temporally prior (and under the rules, or lack thereof, which inhered temporally speaking at that point) to the advent of the subject. In both hypothetical cases (past and future) there is a central problem and that is the assumption that time can be inscribed within chaos, for if the subject inhabits the conditions of radical contingency, and that is all there is, the measured sequence of time must be in itself chaotic and random, the ascribing of numbers to intervals within which things chaotically occur, but only as random occurrences within a null existence, for there can be no grand measure against which to gauge the stability or good sense of the human measure of temporality.<sup>130</sup>

Granted, Meillassoux sought in *After Finitude* precisely to eke out the crisis presented for temporality by the Arche Fossil, in asking how the scientist subject might think a time (the time of the Arche Fossil) anterior to time as commonly understood, when the latter is vital to the human apparatus of perception. The answer, that we should mathematize the archaic time inhabited by the Arche Fossil repeats precisely Brassier's mistake as outlined in Chapter Two, for it replaces Kant's prohibition on the consideration of, the categorization of, experience anterior to the human mind with an invitation to extend outwards, beyond human consciousness, the purview of human understanding. Surely the existence of a time prior to *time* as such - countable time - should be enough to signal the fallacy of the latter, not, rather, to try and correct the existence of anterior time by giving its own system of measure (for that surely would be the intention, not, rather, to ascribe to it a 'colour', or to tailor a suit to fit some hypothetical human embodiment of it). For, returning to Persinger's experiments, whilst the manipulation of magnetic waves

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<sup>130</sup>Brassier himself takes issue with Meillassoux's reliance on temporality in section 3.2.3 of *NU*, and, in fact, addresses much of the rest of *NU* to trying to conceive of a temporal register which resists correlationism, via Laruelle, Deleuze, Nietzsche and Freud. It is this indeed which results in Brassier's appeal to the Arche Fossil in conjunction with the predicted end of the Universe, but in doing this he repeats Meillassoux's mistake of temporalizing the problem of just what to do with the subject (how to bury the corpse), whilst evoking that same subject as some kind of nodal point caught between its non-existence some billions of years ago, and the end of the Universe far in the future. The final call to the subject as the 'organon of extinction' finally appears as no less of a Vitalist affirmation than that which he dismisses in Deleuze. Brassier effectively makes the same mistake as Meillassoux, in failing to simply collapse temporality altogether.

in the human brain in order to induce a 'God experience' does not disprove the existence of God, it does not prove such an existence either. Ditto temporality, the categorization of which serving merely to provide a systematic distraction. This is not to say that such categorizations should not be undertaken by scientists, yet if the job of the philosopher must be to imagine a truth beyond that held at bay by human perception, then perhaps the key in surpassing the restrictive nature of Post-Kantianism resides not in the radical thinking of the unthinkable - for such an act, as has been here demonstrated, lends to philosophy the hegemony of thought which Brassier and Meillassoux professedly aim to evade - but in the possibilities opened up for thought in its restriction. Not as a restriction *for* thought, but as a *tabula rasa* primed for the boundlessness of unreason: Art, in a word, as it comes about during the moment of shudder.

Indeed, to tie everything together, the atemporality proposed here accords with the ahistoricity of the declaration of the readymade, which does not take into account the historical conditions of Art - although, in fact, it is true to say that Art, as the new, never took into account the historical, even as the artwork has history embedded within it. This atemporality is reflective of the atemporality of the financial markets, as demonstrated in their chaotic movement. Indeed, atemporality governs the current epoch, so far as it is possible to talk of one. Political analyses have now shed the notion of cause and effect as civil disturbances - very much in the vein of spontaneous mob revolt, rather than revolutions, which are dependent upon the notion of temporality - are cast as random displays of hooliganism unrooted in cause and effect. Here it is argued that only art can effect a binding of this chaos, through the ruse, for any such binding is impossible in reality.

To regain the line of thought being pursued, put simply, the random motion of falling sycamore seeds, for example, can be incorporated within the Shape of Nothingness, as so many modifications in physical form, that give time its measure for the duration of their

falling, just as the ticking of a clock to a given regular metronomic rhythm also represents so many modifications in physical form which give a measure to chaos. Yet there can be no precedence of one phenomena over the other, there is only the perceived usefulness of one system of measurement over another by the subject. This is precisely the innovation of Kant, following Hume, that Meillassoux wishes to overcome, yet as he wishes to overcome the primacy of time and space as *a priori* categories of human understanding through which ancestrality must be understood, by throwing out the bathwater of causality, he cannot wish to preserve the 'baby' - time - for the distance between a subject and an event, temporally speaking, can no more be objectively measured in time than it can in any other unit within a reality that is both null and radically contingent. To take reality, now, as a null form characterised by chaotic yet inconsequential movements of matter, and to presume to be able to extend a line temporally backwards to a time prior to the existence of the subject - indeed, to a mathematizable 'time anterior to time' - is not merely to deal with the units which philosophical reflection demand since Kant set in place restrictions on thought. It is to presume a stability of existence in the now, which extends to the past, to a reality anterior to subjective experience, and to consequently prioritise time as an ordering factor necessary to existence, rather than merely as a facet through which the subject experiences chaos as just one facet of the latter, for what is there to say that the phenomenon represented by the Arche Fossil does not exist *now*, or 'always' (or, indeed, never) with the ability of the subject to see it as existent in the present merely obscured by the form of the Shape of Nothingness (existence as we know it) and by the nature of chaos, which has as an element of its makeup the phenomenon of time, as perceived by the subject, as but one unique factor? Similarly, one cannot suspend the rules of 'cause' and 'effect', and yet conceive of a God which may come about in the future, even if that God's nature be that 'he' only *might* come into existence, for God must, if one supposes the lack of any ordering principle of reality in a contingent Universe, either 'be' or 'not be' *now*. And this is to say nothing of the existence of God,

which is an issue beyond the remit of this study, but rather to point out the fallacy in conceiving of a temporally functioning but otherwise chaotic mode of being.

In summary, as so far construed, existence as it is perceived philosophically, is the congruence of subjective perception, via the Retina of Experience, upon an overarching Shape of Nothingness which is subject to a radical chaos within which the subject-as-object is complicit as one amongst many phenomena (or objects), of which time is one. The Arche Fossil is a phenomenon which in reality is obscured by time and its passage, but which can be no further from the subject in terms of proximity than any other form upon the Shape of Nothingness, this being due to the nature of a null chaos. Here the responsible philosophical subject faces a dilemma regarding its ability or inability to conceive of the phenomenon represented by the Arche Fossil. For stating that the Arche Fossil marks a time prior to the existence of subjectivity presents an overly subjective formulation in its maintenance of subjective temporality extending back to the point when this 'prior' began, when in reality this 'prior' marks the superfluity of time for truth (as the object of philosophical endeavour). It is worth noting here that the passing of a time 'prior' to that inscribed within the subjective time count must have occurred after the coming into being of the first human subject, something attested to by the fact that all human babies are born without a sense of time. At one time, time must have come into being for the first 'subject', or first being capable of perceiving time, be it an early precursor to man, or a prototype prehistoric dolphin! Given this, it can safely be said that 'once upon a time' a person, or a group of people, apes or aquatic mammals, must have experienced the passing of time from a period prior to 'time' to a period lived according to a framework of time. Given this superfluity of time to existence - it comes and goes, whilst undoubtedly some people have no sense of it - the alternative to the above, to take time out of the equation altogether and to join with those scientists, seers and, no doubt, recreational users of hallucinogenic drugs, who envisage all existence as occurring simultaneously, with time being a mere illusion - removes the distance between the

phenomenon indicated by the Arche Fossil and the subject. They exist as one and the same space. Yet this latter possibility presents two new possible problems: either that the subject is then cast as the God Head, responsible for the endless multiplicity of phenomenon occurring simultaneously around it, or that the subject is subsumed within the whole, the Shape of Nothingness, as one amongst endless meaningless facets. The perceivable existence of phenomena in any case favours the former problem, whilst the likelihood of there being phenomena not perceived by the subject (such as the real phenomenon which gives rise to the Arche Fossil) favours the latter. Yet both are philosophically unsound, for the former marks rampant Idealism, whilst the latter overlooks the centrality of the subject to the possibility of philosophy itself.

Put simply the problem of temporality done away with - re; the significance of archaic and antecedent phenomena for the subject -, it is no longer an issue of whether the ancestry of the Arche Fossil casts its objectivity upon the subject, but more one over whether the Arche Fossil's very existence as embedded within the Shape of Nothingness, yet out of bounds for the subject does. Here the example earlier drawn out, consisting of two empty rooms and no subject bears a different complexion, for whilst one can imagine the rooms to exist whether or not there was a subject present in the rooms or not, when the subject is introduced to the rooms the notion of existence assumes a different order. This is clearest when the imagined subject moves from one room to another and closes the door between the two. When this happens the subject can no longer see, for example, the study behind the closed door, but knows that it exists, having seen it just a second prior to closing the door behind him as it (the subject) went across into the kitchen. The subject knows that the study will still be there when it returns from the kitchen.

Now, suppose the two rooms could be said to exist prior to the literal historical advent of the human subject. Imagine a scientist-subject now taking some kind of device capable of looking back in time and behind walls - in order to see into the two rooms long after they

have been obliterated in reality by some kind of physical phenomenon. In so doing the scientist would see much the same as if he had entered into the rooms some billions of years earlier, indeed, as if he were the subject earlier described as inhabiting those rooms, though he is not actually *in* those rooms, so cannot go so far as to move around opening and closing doors. Now, according to Meillassoux's temporally embedded notion of radical contingency, the aforementioned scientific subject cannot be credited with bringing into existence the phenomena apprehended by his apparatus, yet it cannot be disputed that in being perceived via the scientist's instruments the room has been opened up to an existence of an order different to that in which it existed prior to having been perceived by the scientist-subject. The rooms now, for the contemporary lay person - informed by the media of this unique and baffling scientific discovery - have the property of great treasures learned of but never seen, the individual subject being aware of the reality of the archaic study room, as conveyed by the scientist-subject, but being reliant on media communication of such phenomena, lacking the equipment necessary to verify this 'truth' for itself. On the other hand, the scientist can see a representation of a given phenomenon, but cannot see the *actual* phenomenon, in this case the archaic study and kitchen combination. Only the hypothesized subject who inhabits the two rooms can see the actual room. Though recall that that subject does not inhabit an archaic time period, or at least, *not from the purview of that subject*, any more than the scientist or layman experiences the archaic when they see the contents of the rooms through a scientific instrument or in the pages of a magazine.

What one is faced with is different levels of coming into 'being' of various objects for the subject that apprehends, in whatever way, temporally or geographically distant phenomena, yet what is common to the experience of each individual subject is the coming into being of phenomena made present to them via their sensory apparatus, which would not be present to them if, firstly, the object that is conveyed to them in reality, or via an instrument of communication, did not exist, and secondly, if the sensory apparatus



of the subject did not exist. Now, if something is temporally out of bounds in reality one could argue that the subject cannot be responsible for its coming into being, yet if temporality is collapsed and incorporated within the form of a radically changing nullity it is more the case that all things - whether separated from the subject via temporal or via spatial distance - are equally null, yet that some are thrown into relief for the subject, some of the time (depending on the position of the subject and the attributes of a given phenomenon or 'thing'). Now here the distinction between seeing the phenomena signaled by the Arche Fossil in reality, seeing it through scientific apparatus, or seeing it on TV is the distinction between three radically different experiences, relating, to be sure, to the same set of correlates *A* (Arche Fossil), *B* (the phenomena signified by the Arche Fossil), *C* (the subject who, via its sensory apparatus - the Retina Of Experience - sees 'A'), and *D* the instrument through which this seeing is conveyed. Now, given the richness and diversity of a radically contingent existence there are countless possibilities for the combining of these four facets, yet it is only in the respective conjunction of *A*, *B* and *D* with *C*, the subject, that the phenomena present themselves for philosophical discourse in the first place. At this point it could be argued that the Shape of Nothingness might just as well contain *all things* simultaneously, with the Retina of Experience only capable of apprehending some of them in such a way that they might be experienced physically in the realm of the 'now' - which is ultimately the 'here' - by the living subject. In fact, this would be absolutely in keeping with an absolute and null contingency, contingency being represented by the sheer array of competing 'things' coming randomly into 'view' for the subject, and nullity represented by the non-hierarchical simultaneity of all phenomena.

Now, the problem which Meillassoux attempts to circumvent, both with regard to the Arche Fossil and Spectral Mourning, is the irreconcilability of an inhumane Universe with human existence. How might one think or mourn what is beyond thinking or mourning? Through, as Meillassoux argues, the mathematization of archaic experience,

or the reliance upon the coming into being of a God who might retroactively atone for horror? (And is it not a case anyhow of man playing God in the first scenario, retroactively atoning for the insignificance of the human by mathematizing the void which threatens to take from him his rational distance from nullity)? Yet, surely, given the radical impossibility of reconciling the unknown with human experience, it would be better to embrace the irrational and uncertain as a means of leveraging from them a space in which 'life' could be 'lived' under the meager conditions which inhere in 'reality'. It is for this reason that it is felt that temporality is a red herring as regards the boundaries of subjective experience, for one can only speak of what is present and what is not present for the subject, and consign the rest of existence to the null and chaotic realm which one can only reasonably assume it to inhabit, not least, as one cannot know anything of the realm that the subject does inhabit, aside from what appears for the subject as a result of random activity upon the Shape of Nothingness - as immediately present, or as refracted via a telescopic lens (to take one example) - of which the subject is just a component part.

To be sure, this offers little succor to the subject, but this is where the art-conceptual ruse must come into play, not, indeed, in order to offer false hope, but in order to confidently stake out the subject's centrality to an existence (*its* existence) which must remain on the whole unknowable to it, but which it can explore tirelessly so far as is possible in light of both what it can and what it can't know. To consider the implications of such a move, it is necessary to reconsider conceptualism with regard to the sensory apparatus of the subject, such that a pure conceptualism, devoid of object, can be reconciled with its inherent objectivity.

---'I' Ball---

The 'Chocolate Grinder' by Marcel Duchamp is sublime when one knows that it is in Rouen that he found it. It is necessary to know that the Municipal Museum of Art in Rouen owns '*Les énérvées de Jumiéges*,' and that Joan of Arc was roasted at Rouen.  
- Salvador Dali<sup>131</sup>

What follows is an examination of the act of 'looking' at the artwork in terms of an interaction between the art-object and the subject-that-is-object within the wider objective realm. The purpose being to signal not the differences but the fundamental similarity between the retinal and the non-retinal, for in an objective realm, upon which all experiences are equally null, the experience of 'viewing' the artwork is exemplary of the manner in which the subject, in its opening on to the world via sensory perception, presents a lacuna in objectivity, even though that experience is fundamentally objective. The objectivity of this experience is reflected in the pure conceptual gesture (i.e. the self-declaration of the freedom of the subject as an artistic statement) as the mind of the subject forms the vital recording function at the hub of the Retina of Experience (i.e. the sensory apparatus). Only in the case of the self-declaration of freedom from the object by the subject, the mind goes ahead of reality, declaring the sensory apparatus and the corpus of the subject as an artistic readymade (the 'conceptual turn', as the concept, or art concept, ostensibly goes ahead of reality). From here the declaration of the Arche Fossil, or *whatever*, as Art, can be retroactively proclaimed as knowledge of it is drawn through the sensory apparatus, or re-evoked (recalled) in the mind of the subject.

To begin by referring to the experience of one of two art forms (the other being music) most familiar to the lay person, *Les énérvées de Jumiéges* (cited above) is a painted portrayal of the moment when the two sons of the mythical King Clovis had the principle tendons in their legs severed by their mother as a punishment for rebellion against their

<sup>131</sup> Cabanne P. *Ibid.*, p14

father, before being sent out upon the Seine in a small boat, to float - incapable of escape - to their starvation, or death by drowning. An unnerving portrayal, rendered unto the viewer by dint of the unique tools of perception available to the subject. The work itself is mere oil and pigment upon cotton duck, a conglomeration of cells beamed through the refraction of light onto the retina of the subject, processed as chemical signals, which are then interpreted by the brain.

One might imagine the artist, Luminais, at work on the above mentioned piece, adjusting forms, painting the boat with its two young victims smaller and further away, more and less opaque, and yet further away again. Suppose, in a flurry of brushstrokes, somewhere in 1880s France, that he then paints out the boat - and its hapless prisoners - altogether. Beam forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and the viewer stands in front of an empty landscape, a painting void of people. Though the latter possibility is of course impossible; the subject is *always* arguably present in face of the artwork.

The link between Luminais and Duchamp made by Salvador Dali above highlights an inherent brutality in the work of Duchamp, in the steady move from near-mechanically reproduced paintings of banal objects to the declaration of the mere objects themselves as 'readymade' artworks in their own rights. The brutality resides in stripping the life-giving illusion of the artwork from the subject. Yet if such a wound can be endured the subject can emerge out of this situation somehow stronger, for Duchamp's innovation ultimately demonstrates that the site of Art was never located in the work.

Duchamp's readymade will here be approached as a means of appropriating Adorno's shudder, in order to ascertain whether it is indeed possible for the subject to evade complete objectivity. It will be argued that Duchamp's manoeuvre - the invention of the readymade - retroactively imparts upon all Art its principle role as conveyor of a straightforward and banal ruse. Art as illusion signals the hopelessness of human

endeavor, - as the ostensibly free artwork can never escape its objectivity - yet simultaneously attests to the possibility of deception, which must principally become, following the withdrawal of any privileged status from Art (re; the notion that anything can be art), and from the artist (re; Beuys's declaration that "we are all artists") a deception as to the possibility of 'life' itself, aside from the artwork. To better demonstrate this, it will be helpful to reconsider the experience of looking at Art as it takes place.

Firstly, the experience of looking at Art in relation to those works which are made and which represent an effort at emulating or surpassing nature is one in which the subject is confronted by a crafted attempt to evoke an overcoming of objectivity for the subject. When confronted with such a work, if it is to be worthy of being called 'Art' at all, the subject will experience 'shock' as the initial apparent superiority of the work - whether abstract or literal - to nature gives way to the realization of the materiality of the work and therefore of the subject, as it is caught in its momentary transcendence of its material conditions. The shudder arises as what appears at one point to allow for a transcendence of the objective realm, of death, reneges on its promise. As a consequence the subject realizes that, in light of the chasm between the transcendence of death, which was promised but not delivered, and the reality of life's being the shadow of death, that the subject must indeed *be alive*, or, put otherwise, *be subject*. The subject is the chasm between its objectivity and the possibility of the transcendence of that objectivity.

Now, the question is over whether such a phenomenon can take place in a completely reified society? And this is not solely a question over whether one might surpass the hype that surrounds every great work, or, indeed, whether any new work can escape the auspices of the market so as to effect a shock in the subject. It is further a question over whether the subject can be said to exist sufficiently so that it might ally itself with the artwork and impart the momentary experience of 'life' as felt in the face of the artwork

onto the Shape of Nothingness? That is to say, that when faced with a Rembrandt, or a Pollock, or a Hume, and when, at the crucial moment at which the illusion rendered in paint gives way to raw materials, as if cruelly revealing the materiality of the subject to itself, is it possible that there is no subject as such attendant to realize its difference from the object? Setting aside the abstraction inherent in such a statement - for clearly there *are* subjects, even if completely objective in complexion - the question is ultimately one over how the subject might withstand the objectification of itself that rationality demands in its rightful search for truth, and which capital imposes as an unwanted but ever present by-product of rationality. We might suppose, for example, the interaction between the subject and Velasquez's *Rockeby Venus* to be one in which the subject as a complex of cells receives - via the refraction of light travelling from the oil and pigment which make up the image to the retina, and then on to the brain - an image as the mere registering by the subject of the painted work in conjunction with its sensory apparatus. In this sense the mental image imparted to the subject by the *Rockeby Venus* is just one facet of the complex Shape of Nothingness, and, indeed, forms no more of an 'inside' to the object's 'outside' than the interior of an object - a tree, a car engine, a box full of heirlooms - can be said to be the obverse of the object itself. The appearance of Art for the subject is seamlessly linked to the materiality of the work itself, as inner and outer effectively become one. For in a seamless state of objectivity, of nullity, the human subject has its every surface presented at once to the reality of objectivity. There can be no hierarchy between liver, forehead, knee, eye, brain, back-of-the-knee and so on. The relation between the retina, the artwork, and the brain merely distinguishes itself for the retina's particular capacity to evoke experience for the subject. Yet the objective value of this experience in truth must override the tendency to proclaim it as a signifier of some greater worth of the subject over its constituent parts, or over any other part of the Shape of Nothingness, from the gallery floor to its walls, its fittings, its dust.

Even when we consider the 'truth' of subjectivity as it appears for the subject, as a relative sharpening or adjusting of experience such that the subject might be said to exist as an object with a unique ability to perceive and process information, the banality of contemporary existence presents itself as a further obstacle to subjectivity as all interactions become reducible to their value as capital.

In this sense it is the sensory capacity of the subject, as objective which, whilst presenting the artwork to the subject in such a way as to perhaps, given the right conditions - i.e. those in which the artwork can be seen as truly novel, and therefore capable of breaking through the closed confines of the ever same presented by rationality and capital - evoke the shudder for the subject, also brings objectivity to bear upon the subject, for the very fact that the sensory apparatus is both objective and finite. It is categorizable as mere matter and pliable to the needs of capital, which has co-opted the subjective sensory apparatus both as labour and as consumer.

A flipside of the readymade artwork as earlier presented (as corollary to capital) is that, in attempting to step beyond the sensory, or the retinal - as Duchamp has it - it allows for the possibility of transcending in thought the boundary presented by objectivity. When looking at the banal readymade, one is not confronted with a painted or sculpted allusion to perfection which falls away on close inspection as the image gives way to matter. The subject, rather, is asked to think that a given manufactured or found object is *Art*, where Art represents the existence of something non-stratifiable, something beyond the injunction that everything be reducible to measures, figures and financial values. Though the attribution of the status 'Art' to a given pre-made object operates on two distinct levels. Firstly, of course, there is the sense that one must look at whichever banal object has been declared to be Art as an artwork much like any other. Secondly, there is a sense in which the readymade is specifically not an artwork like any other, in that it merely holds a place for the consideration of Art, yet is in itself superfluous. The difference here

is not insignificant, for bound up in this difference is the key to understanding the role of readymade Art in its relation to subjectivity. Put quite simply, the difficulty posed in the first mode of looking at readymade Art, for the fact that the readymade artwork's pointing to perfection is one encompassed entirely in the designation of the readymade as 'Art' makes the second mode of looking at the readymade - as an anonymous placeholder - appear rational. Yet on closer inspection the idea that a given object is merely a location at which a consideration of Art might take place cannot be held as true because the banality with which such choices are made suggests a given object, location or site to be irrelevant. So what in fact the readymade does is render Art banal, and incapable of bringing about the near transcendence of objectivity which would otherwise instill a momentary awareness of subjectivity for the 'subject' that is 'object' in its difference from mere objectivity. Art is not an illusory transcendence, which shows the subject to itself in its linkedness to and difference from the object. Art is merely an object, and this fact is imparted upon all art-objects retroactively once the moment for Art as 'perfection' is gone. And yet, the irreconcilability between the desire to see the artwork as transcendent and the desire to see it as universal, as (re; de Duve) 'the anything whatsoever becomes the anyone whosoever' places the transcendent and universal capacities of the Art object, both of which are present but thwarted, firmly in the realm of the subject. For it is the subject's failing both to see its subjectivity in the uniqueness and illusory value of the readymade, and to extend the promise of Art infinitely to all objects which renders Art obsolete. And this failing coincides precisely with the subject's objectification. However, if the moment for Art has passed, and if the amenability to exchange of the readymade as the absolute investment commodity signals Art's always having been 'readymade' (the readymade only accelerates what Art always was, as earlier argued), the flipside remains that it is the subject which must declare Art. It cannot be declared on the part of the objective realm aside from the subject. And here, the first mode of looking at the readymade might be re-examined, for what it might most radically suggest is that the readymade is not only to be taken as an irrelevant site of Art, which



might be transferred to anywhere and any object. Rather, the idea that the readymade object is changeable, to be picked at random, suggests that the designation of something as 'Art' resides squarely with the subject. As such, might it not be possible that the subject can declare 'Art' aside from the object? And is this not what happens in any case when the subject considers the banal object to be 'Art'? It is worth at this point reconsidering the shudder as it might manifest in the presence of the readymade.

As the subject sees the readymade they are asked to see a banal object as an artwork. The banal aspect is all important, for if it were something non-banal - a roadkilled Fox wearing a baseball cap, for example - the reaction in the subject would be something other than to the banal object as 'Art'. Suppose that is an object that everyone is familiar with, and which does not evoke strong connotations related to bathroom functions, sexual activity, violence, politics or religion (as is often, unwittingly or not the case with the readymade). In this way one might assess objectively the relation between the subject and the object as readymade artwork.

The first thing that occurs is that conceiving of such an object is not easy. Objects that are long, circular, or open ended will evoke thoughts about sex or simply about the genital regions, whereas objects that are pointed, or even blunt, might evoke violence (or, indeed, sex). Very delicate, or very heavy objects might evoke a pathos related to religion and so on (or, indeed, again, to sex!). To refer to banal objects common to all of us is also unhelpful. For what is common to all, other than clothes (which evoke sexuality or power), cutlery and food (which evoke arguments around gender equality, sex, power and violence) and toilets, in their many guises (bodily functions, and, again, sex and violence)? This analysis is crude, to be sure, but it goes without saying that there are further myriad associations that an individual may make in relation to an object, in relation to their own personal experience. For this reason one need take recourse to the kind of uncategorisable anonymous objects which advanced capital uniquely

manufactures. For the purpose of this exercise these objects might be called ‘anonymous objects’.

Anonymous objects are those which were manufactured for some purpose, but which lose over time the ‘use value’ associated with their function. Often these objects are appendages to other objects; food blender accessories or components; computer hardware add-ons; long obsolete phone adaptors. It would be impossible to give a generic description of such an object, except to say that the displaced, homeless and destitute in many major cities can be found, for want of real saleable products, selling these anonymous objects in and around street markets (this phenomenon can be seen near Brick Lane Market on a Sunday, for as long as it can continue unhampered by a shutdown by the authorities – no doubt before the advent of the 2012 Olympics. Such trade anomalies disappear year by year as part of the onward march towards societal homogenisation). Junk shops also sometimes house anonymous objects, hoping that by chance an 1980s home PC enthusiast will chance upon the one component needed to reboot their Commodore 64 (or whatever). Often people find such objects in their lofts or basements, and, forgetting why they have not yet thrown them away, hold onto them, lest they might one day perform some kind of vital function relating to another object which they can’t quite recall, but which must have existed.

For now, picture such an object. The said object is shaped in such a way as to suggest it should be appended to something else, and cannot clearly be complete in itself, yet it is not clear what it should be appended to. In this way the said object is truly anonymous, and yet truly banal, as it has no distinguishing features, becoming just one amongst billions of such objects that litter cupboards, attics, junk shops and landfill sites the world over. Now, one can imagine the finder of this object, an artist, presenting the said object as a readymade artwork. In fact, the artist might build a career out of finding anonymous objects and presenting them in this way. The subject then confronted with this object, as

Art, is unable to view the object as something which transcends the natural order in itself. It is neither fantastic enough to suggest transcendence, or banal enough to be instantly recognizable. The subject, confronted with this anonymous object has nothing to distinguish it from the utterly null continuum of objective existence but its status *as Art*. The object is truly non-retinal, capable of eliciting nothing in the way of beauty, awe or some other kind of attraction. Yet, as Art, the subject knows it to be something 'other', something ostensibly removed from the normal system of exchange. Something that is not 'merely' objective. To refer back to de Duve's formulation, conceptual Art is purposiveness without purpose and without beauty. The act of looking at a readymade, when it is truly non-retinal - i.e. 'anonymous', monadic, even - requires that the subject looks at Art, stripped of the aesthetic attributes which might otherwise lead to a momentary sensation of transcendence from the objective realm. Yet in being an 'Art' experience, the objective realm is still arguably transcended momentarily as the idea of transcendence, of freedom from objectivity.

Art, in short, becomes the pure Idea of freedom, only to be thwarted, as the subject realizes that neither the object nor subject undergo change during the process. As a consequence the subject must return to objective reality, in the meantime discovering the possibility of momentarily evading objectivity *in thought*. Therefore, the amenability of the readymade to capitalist exchange - the anonymous object might fetch a fortune at auction - meets with the possibility of the subject conceiving of its independence from the object, and for no particular reason to be found in the Art object itself. The question becomes, 'why the object'? In fact, just such a question was posed by Gino de Dominicis, who building upon the Duchamp's and Beuys's injunctions that anything can be Art, and anyone can be an artist, asked why 'nothing' could not be posited as 'Art', as he cordoned off spaces in galleries - forming part or all of various installations such as *I am sure that you are (and always will be) either inside or outside this triangle*, (1970) - a triangular area marked out on the floor - and asked the audience either to see forms

within the space, or to conceive of a specific empty space in-itself as 'Art'. Yet even this act depended upon reference to some 'outside', some other element; 'space'. In any case, it is arguable that such an opaque reference, to 'space' or to anonymous objects, to things that are impenetrable in themselves, in any case divests the object of its central function as the shudder is evoked, making of the Retina of Experience a sensory loop which evades objectivity as the nervous system, in its inability to transcend the opaque objective realm, shorts and declares Art on its own account. This marks the conceptual turn as the declaration of the Retina of Experience as Art by the subject (which is itself composed of chemical processes in the brain which react to experiences conveyed by that same sensory apparatus). And here it is possible to develop the cursory reference to monadism made one paragraph back.

In reference to the monad Adorno argues in *AT* that:

The realization of a specific work always presupposes qualities gained beyond the spell of the work's specification; only dilettantes confuse originality with *tabula rasa*. Although it appears to be merely subjective the *totum* of forces invested in the artwork is the potential presence of the collective according to the level of the available productive forces: Windowless, it contains the monad.<sup>132</sup>

Monadism is here referred to by way of explaining the linkedness of the artwork to the world at large via the process of artistic labour or '*métier*'. Arguably the unusual turn of phrase 'windowless it contains the monad', arises as the artwork, monadic in its separation from the world outside itself, is also a product of the mediated labour of the artist.

Originality is not the presentation of a blank slate in the sense of something completely untainted by the past, but the buildup of labour over time, across individual artworks, and

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<sup>132</sup> Adorno. T.W. p43 Windowless it contains the monad: 'fensterlos enthaelt es die Monade' in the original German, where Adorno apparently here refers either to the *Kollektiv*, or to the *Totum*, which are in any case associate terms.

influenced by extra subjective existence - the artist-subject in conjunction with mediated history. Though perhaps key to understanding the above passage is an ambiguity of expression, in that it is not explicitly clear whether Adorno refers to the 'totum' of forces, to the 'artwork', or to the 'presence of the collective' as being windowless and *containing* the monad. Whilst it is highly probable that it is the 'artwork' to which Adorno refers *as containing the totem of forces* which are revealed to the subject, this ambiguity is not insignificant, as it owes, as ambiguity, to what is actually being said. To make this clearer it is necessary to refer to another passage from *AT*:

Artworks are closed to one another, blind and in their hermeticism they represent what is external. Thus it is, in any case, that they represent themselves to tradition as that living autarchy that other was fond of calling entelechy, the synonym for monad. It is possible that the more problematic the concept of teleology becomes in organic nature the more intensively it condensed itself in artworks. As an element of an overarching text of the spirit of an epoch, entwined with history and society, artworks go beyond their monadic limit even though they lack windows. The interpretation of an artwork as an imminent, crystallised process at a standstill approximates the concept of the monad.<sup>133</sup>

This 'imminent crystallised process at a standstill' is unraveled for the subject as a totem of forces sedimented within the work, yet it is clear that this fact is only made useful to the subject for the application of the term 'Art' to a given object. For the sedimentation of historical and social forces must surely be present in objects that are not specifically artworks; war memorabilia, computer software, old agricultural tools, second hand clothes, phosphorous light bulbs, kitchen equipment, and so on. All objects new and old contain the sum of labour relations leading up to their creation. The distinction with an artwork is that history and social relations are sedimented within, but in such a way as to evade being co-opted by rationality and capital (i.e. the collective of forces are

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p237

sedimented, but within an opaque - 'windowless' - monad). Put simply, whilst all non-art objects arguably exist in the objective whole - both physical (the Shape of Nothingness) and social (capitalist society) - within which the subject is embedded as just one unfree element amongst others, it is the artwork's claim to be independent of the objective whole which allows the subject to see the true relation between subject and object un-obscured within the artwork. In this sense the totem of forces revealed, for Adorno - speaking of the modern abstract work - by the artwork as an unfettered truth regarding the domination of man by capital is the message that Art conveys via its deception as to its freedom from the negative whole represented by rationality. The opacity of Adorno's statement regarding the windowless monad accords - intentionally or not - with the simultaneity with which various forces play out within the monad.

The trouble is that this untruth itself cannot be told now for the very reason that the notion of Art has been co-opted to the capitalist cause. And this is where the short circuiting that occurs in the face of the readymade, whereby the subject declares 'Art' even in face of a banal and anonymous object, one that is not suggestive of autonomy in itself, becomes crucial. Yet at this point, being as deception is key, and being as the subject is in a position where it can only reasonably think itself to be unfree, but whereby it must continue to seek freedom in the hope it might one day find it, it is worth asking - again, and here the answer will shortly be delivered - whether the subject need have recourse to the object at all, or whether some militant form of conceptualism might be born, in which the subject declares itself to be free, with recourse to 'Art', but aside from the null objective realm?

---Joan of Art: Towards a Conceptual Militancy---

Leibniz's question in his 'Monadology', as to how, if the Universe consists of only closed monads, life can be said to exist, is answered in a sense by Adorno's positing of the artwork as monad. That is to say, the theological position of Leibniz, whereby God is evoked to explain how monads change and become other over time – as limited individual parts of the whole striving to understand God - is superseded by an atheist model where sense derives from the momentary truth that the artwork imparts, not as salvation from the nullity of existence, but rather as a promise:

'What art, notably the art decried as Nihilistic, says in refraining from judgments is that everything is not just nothing. If it were, whatever is would be pale, colourless, indifferent. No light falls on men and things without reflecting transcendence. Indelible from the resistance to the fungible world as barter is the resistance of the eye that does not want the colours of the world to fade. Semblance is a promise of nonsemblance.'<sup>134</sup>

That is to say, semblance as mimicry of objectivity promises delivery from that same objectivity. Yet if truth as revealed via the artwork as monad can no longer exist in its feigned difference from capital and objectivity it is left to the subject as monad to reach beyond its own bounds and evoke a beyond, as a binding of the null chaos that otherwise pervades. For Meillassoux's radical contingency as a directive, that nothing can be 'true', that nothing can inhere in any sense of other a fleeting one, fails where it attempts to bind the radical uncertainty which might justify extremist violence. This failing occurs as extremists become arguably bound towards murderous behaviour precisely as an exploding of the false rational order - bombs in market places challenge precisely the logic of the capitalist tendency to 'count' everything, in that there can be no quantitative logic ascribed to such an act - whilst rationality itself tends towards a barbarism precisely

<sup>134</sup> Adorno T.W. 1973, p404

due to the contingent and null reality it uncovers. Yet as a means of gnosis of the absurdity of the absolute (as absolutely contingent and, re; Brassier, null) violence - whether state sanctioned to maintain the march towards complete objectivity (which one can assume to be in any case complete) or sanctioned in the name of the absolute - cannot be the final word. That is to say, it need not be, and if there is any reason not to evoke violence - essentially, to argue for subjectivity (life) in the realm of objectivity (violence, death) - it must be that there other options, should we want to try them.

The question then is how to stick with the nihilising influence of Scientistic Philosophy, which is laudable in its thorough servitude to truth, whilst binding that chaotic nullity in such a way as to allow the subject 'in'. Any such binding must occur not through the proclamation of a certainty, but through the embrace of a thorough uncertainty within which the subject can be comfortably incorporated. It is left then to the subject which inheres within the null and contingent Shape of Nothingness to perform a binding of the non-spatially and non-temporally defined realm as a deception (for such a realm cannot be bound in fact), and here Adorno's shudder can be appropriated aside from the modern art object which Adorno saw as essential to subjective experience in an otherwise objective realm. It is in the bias of Scientistic Philosophy towards the object that it repeats the philosophical mistake it attempts to overstep. For in objectifying all things, and then making them, further, radically contingent it is left to ask to whom philosophy is addressed and by whom it is posed. And this is before stopping to ask just what there is to be said of the object once the status of the subject as privileged is shed. For such a privilege has never in any case been a joy for the subject to behold, but rather a privilege which requires stoic duty to the protection of an injunction on overstepping its boundaries, for such an injunction in any case imprisons the subject. True, the subject is indeed object and objects-in-themselves must exist as aside from that subject-as-object, but too little in these statements (which form the basis of Scientistic Philosophy) appears as radical or new. To be sure, the reiteration of the limits of the subject builds upon a



legacy of Science developed since Kant's Copernican turn, and its application to philosophy is novel, yet the proposed remedy to the allegedly subject-oriented nature of Post-Kantian thought, which involves taking great pains to objectify the subject even beyond the obvious appearance that philosophers *are* subjects and that everything which is known is known *to the subject*, remains unconvincing. And if there is a certain ambiguity at large here, re; the call for the acknowledgment of subjectivity at the same time as an admission of absolute objectivity is made, this is tribute to the fact that the contradiction which inheres in the philosophical tendency towards objectivity requires precisely ambiguity so that it can function. For in reality what is required of the subject is that it declares itself as existent, thus enforcing the subjective pole as something self-proclaimed in light of its fallacy, but also in that subjectivity inheres and cannot be wished away. Such a self-proclamation then marks the binding of complete uncertainty as the self-proclamation of subjectivity casts off doubt, and posits itself as a truth. 'I exist'. Or 'I' exists.

The bringing about of life (subjectivity), through such a deception in which the subject claims its material basis (as object) by appeal to a ruse which can only be an 'Art' statement, both acknowledges the deception inherent in such a statement and acknowledges the resistance of thought to such a deception. This might be better explained with recourse to the titular character of this sub-section and study: 'Joan of Art'.

In self-declaring its monadic self to be 'subject' the process undergone by the subject is similar to that undergone when wish casting. That is to say, from magic ritual, to prayer to simple wishful thinking, to self-help style positive enunciations (standing in front of mirror chanting 'in very way and every day I will become better/stronger/more confident', the kind of thing that generally riles the philosophical fraternity) the simple aim is to posit something - a desired situation or outcome - as existent *now*. It is indeed

arguable that much philosophy aims at a similar outcome, accounting for the vagaries which mark the final paragraphs of so many texts which otherwise proceed scientifically so far as possible. The hope for a better world is the underpinning of much unessential - i.e. beyond eating, breathing, etc. - activity. However, in the case that the subject self-declares itself as existent, as other than mere object, as capable therefore of perhaps transcending the restrictive objective conditions it inhabits, the subject, in that self-declaring, makes no recourse to a doctrine or god such that a higher truth embodied by such a figure might then be bestowed on that the subject. Rather, the subject makes a declaration in spite of the objective null and chaotic reality which inheres. The subject, rather than appealing to a god that exists, or that, re; Meillassoux, might one day exist, appeals to a god that categorically doesn't exist. That is, to 'Art'. For this arguably must be an Art statement as only Art can lie so brazenly - i.e. claim subjectivity where that subjectivity is questionable - and maintain its credibility. Such a turn, away from commitment to objective truth puts the concept ahead of the object, yet precisely as an Art concept, which *as Art* can live entirely comfortably with its deceptive premises. Though it must also be noted that there is nothing essentially untrue in such an Art-conceptual statement - 'I am a subject' - it is, rather, that given the ambiguity of the subject's status, as the *subject that is object* with its centrality to existence but not to experience, at some point a leap into a certainty drawn along one pole of existence has to be made for the subject to concretely claim its existence at all. The art conceptual turn resides in claiming experience as being drawn along one pole; that of a subjectivity that is objective, and which registers, via the sensory apparatus the existence of the purely objective pole.

It is as a cipher for this process that *Joan of Art* might be appealed to as a figure 'prayed to' in the knowledge that she, it, is merely a deception, with that 'prayer' (under *sou rature*, as an Art-conceptual statement) being the declaration by the subject of its being, *as an Art statement*. The point then is not to bind negativity with recourse to a temporally

distant figure, but to a non-existent figure. The innovation here is that whilst it is true that the subject is at base an object, it could also be said that, in thought, the subject can declare itself as other than mere object, can appeal to Joan of Art (Art, in a word), to distinguish itself from the null void it inhabits. The crucial aspect here is that none of this finds itself a loggerheads with scientific finding, for thought, the concept - purely conceptual art - must be treated of as one facet amongst others within the realm which the subject 'exists' within. And whilst the same could be said of god-belief (i.e. it exists, as 'belief'), the latter attempts to take on faith what can't be proven, whereas the self-declarative Art statement, the 'prayer' to 'Joan of Art' does not make reference to a higher being or attempt to append spirit to the physical realm.

The process, in fact, is not dissimilar to that outlined variously in this study with reference to the subject confronted with the 'new' artwork. For in appealing to Joan of Art what the subject must do is temporarily give itself over to a feigned ideal in its attempted flight from objectivity, before realizing that, as feigned, nothing has been gained. However, in the process itself the subject has realized its capacity to posit and process thought, and as such becomes other than mere object. That this process can be undertaken aside from the art-object attests to the continuation of subjectivity under the aegis of objectivity. The shudder as an estrangement from nature that remains embedded within the latter gives the lie to the complete administration of life, which seeks to make unquestioning objects of people. Yet at the same time no leap toward freedom is naively made. The militant element in appealing to Art resides in the concept taking what rightfully belongs to it - the freedom to think - even in spite of the impossibility of thought aside from the objectivity that underpins it. This militancy, as a militancy of the concept, can be taken further, for the subject, as the Retina of Experience, is manifest on two levels. On one level there is the subject that thinks (but is object) and on another level there is the subject *that thinks that it thinks* aside from objectivity, but which is in any case mere material (for that second 'thinking' is a ruse). The latter subject is

subjected to anxiety, as it attempts to overcome its inherent ambiguity. This anxiety cannot be broached by the sincerely truthful Hegelian entwining of opposites as the truth of subjectivity meets the truth of objectivity. Rather, here anxiety is broached by truth (Scientific Philosophy) and by deception (Joan of Arc) as ambiguous experience is split between the materiality of sensory and cognitive apparatus and the capacity for deception on the other. Both the impossibility of making Art within a reified society and the impossibility of conceiving of a subject in a rational and capitalist society are surpassed by a ruse, the strength of which resides in its adherence to scientific truth, which is precisely demonstrated by its admission of its deception. In lying Art tells the truth.

The path of philosophy since Kant, characterised by the diremption between subject and object has naturally tried to regain an understanding of the object. Yet the net result of such efforts is a re-entrenchment of the speculative nature of the Post-Kantian project under the guise of a thorough going rationality. Where that speculative element is acknowledged it still fails to come to terms with the fallacy in doing away with dialectical method, which, in short, amounts to a casting of the subject into the unknowable realm of objectivity, whilst failing to account for the entirely speculative requirement needed in order to then extricate that subject so far as to explain its existence. It is in this respect that the scientising of philosophy can only avoid becoming mere speculation by admitting of the irrecoverable distance not between subject and object as such, but between the *subject and object* (as entwined) on the one hand with the subject being *merely* objective in complexion, and the subject and the object as separate on the other hand, with the latter being perceived by the former. This latter pole is the Retina of Experience, as the objective apparatus of perception, through which, it must be surmised, the former pole is made present to thought. In this sense, far from being done away with, the dialectic now operates between deception (the 'prayer' to Joan of Arc) and 'reality', characterized by the chaotically shifting and null form of the Shape of Nothingness within which the subject is embedded. The subject inheres even in a non-

dialectical objective thought system, as a shadow cast tellingly over the fallacy of such thought, for the thought which thinks such thought is the subject, insofar as *subject = thought*, even where that subject is composed of material processes.

It is the monadic existence of the subject as an un-shiftable stain of experience upon the null void it inhabits which attests to the irrational core without which philosophical reflection itself would be impossible. As irreducible to objective criteria such an irrationality, definable as 'Art', is itself a null form, but one which stands at odds with the pervasive nature of the nullity that it inhabits. Out of this monadic existence the Retina of Experience, definable as sensory perception, together with its cognitive adjuncts, gives voice to the objects it apprehends, as an eye cast onto reality, out of which the latter takes shape. All the while, the discussion - which is played out physically within the Shape of Nothingness as 8 billion sensory outfits turn themselves to existence - resounds as to the superiority of subject or of object. But this discussion is to miss the point, for it is in the wide infinite gap between what a subject aspires to - autonomy, life - and reality that the subject grasps itself in the moment of shudder – the realisation of itself as being responsible for experience, filtered via its own sensory apparatus, and yet bound by the objectivity of existence - as illusory. In this sense the artwork and the subject could be said to be concomitant.

Adorno grants – via 'play' – artistic hubris as the principle player in arts overcoming of sublime emptiness:

The reduction that beauty imposes on the terrifying, over and out of which beauty raises itself as from a sacred temple, has – in the face of the terrifying – something powerless in it. For the terrifying digs in on the perimeter like the enemy in front of the walls of the beleaguered city and stares it out.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Adorno T.W. 1991, p51

The subject, as Art, must become the lacuna which beauty represents in the above passage, and in so doing must become a lacuna of life within the lifeless island that is the Shape of Nothingness. In so becoming, the subject as lacuna casts 'life' upon the otherwise null objective realm, even whilst remaining an objective facet of that realm. It is in this moment - in which the declaration of the possibility of Art is both appealed to and made - that radical contingency and nullity are bound and mourning is staved off, not as a circumvention of horror, but as crystallization of null and contingent forces, and a seizing of atemporality and infinite possibility as a temporary crystallization of absolute contingency. That crystallisation *is* the subject, as it apprehends and throws light upon one or other phenomena upon the Shape of Nothingness. Such a feigning of control temporarily delays the helplessness of the subject versus the natural object, and turns Art against commodification, for the pure thought of Art cannot yet be co-opted by capital.

The question might then be asked over how the subject, which is objective in complexion, and which exists within a null and chaotic void as part of the form of that same void can declare the shudder of its own volition – i.e. from where does the 'concept' derive. It may indeed be more accurate to say that the shudder is something that inheres as one of countless random phenomena, as just one side effect of chaos. Indeed it is a base condition of life for the subject, and if it did not occur, as the subject's realisation of its difference from the wider object, in its capacity as 'Retina of Experience', then it would simply not provide cause for reflection. Moreover, reflection itself would not be possible. The shudder is, in short, the subject's realisation of the very possibility that it shudders, or that it 'lives'. The fact that it is also crucial for discourse gives the lie to forms of discourse that seek to undermine such a phenomena (i.e. subjectivity itself). For whilst it would be possible to argue that due to the involuntary aspect of the shudder, it must remain an empty gesture - as must discourse - it still remains that the subject is made present via shudder, something which cannot but be worthy of discourse, empty or not. And if the shudder cannot come about through appeal to the artwork - as an object that deceives as to its autonomy from objectivity - and in so doing then leads the subject to

realise its own complicity with, and difference from the object, then it remains for the subject to feign that experience via an appeal to Art as concept, if the subject is to exist at all. That is to say, that as seen with regard to anonymous objects and with with regard to the Duchampian readymade in relation to the shudder, the declaration of 'Art' resides firmly in the subjective – i.e. 'conceptual' realm. <sup>136</sup>

It is in this instance that the subject must render its own sensory and cognitive apparatus - via an appeal to Art - *as* the material object which is ostensibly free from objectivity *per se*, before realising the fallacy of such a proclamation. Yet it is in realising the fallacy of such a proclamation - the non-existence of the false 'god', Joan of Art, which was from the offset a lie - and therefore its objectivity, that the subject momentarily 'lives'. To call such a position overly subjective misses precisely the point, which is that it is only following a realisation of its objectivity that the subject - monadic, yet filled with the experience of the wider object - can shudder.

The question could still be raised as to how it is possible to conceive of a 'free will' on the part of the subject who must appeal to the concept of Art in order that it can shudder. Yet such a question can be dismissed relatively simply by appropriating a Calvinist argument. For where the Calvinist would argue that whilst all people are already destined either for Heaven or Hell - their names having been written either in the book of the damned or the book of life at the beginning of time - they must make good on their duties to God, in order *to ensure that they are one of the people who are* destined for heaven, rather than eternal damnation *for one can only be destined for heaven if one acts like a person destined for heaven* . That is to say, a lack of free will regarding whether the subject shudders or not, does not dictate that the said subject just wait to shudder (to *live*) or not

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<sup>136</sup> Though I must be here noted that the term 'conceptual' as used here owes to the description of art made in the Duchampian mould as 'conceptual' (i.e. ideas and not materials based) and not to a philosophical description of the 'concept' or to its possibility. Certainly this aspect has also been covered, but it is important for the reader to bear in mind that this discussion takes place principally with regard to a discussion of the possibility of 'subjectivity'. Occasional seeming crossovers between the terms 'concept' and 'subject' (as independent subjective thought is cast as possible on accord of an Art-conceptual declaration 'I am the subject') should not be seen as an inconsistency of terminology.

(to remain 'dead'), for if the subject were, by dint of chaotic forces beyond its control, to shudder, then it would need to go through a process involving cognitive realisation of its objectivity, and, therefore its status as subject, because that precisely *is* the process of shudder. Put simply, where for the Calvinist the subject knows that it's destined for heaven only if it knows that it's actively living as someone destined for heaven (i.e. free of sin and dedicated to God), the secular subject can only know that it is subject by declaring that it is subject, even if that declaration comes about a something effectively *done to* the hapless subject as an involuntary set of chemical responses reacting to stimuli, or to the fact of the subject's being embodied within its corpus and possessing its sensory apparatus. The deception - I 'live' -. must be actively '*thought*' as a declaration of subjectivity which can equally account for its obvious objectivity. It is therefore possible - and necessary - to, via an Artistic proclamation, i.e. one which can sustain the untruth of its content - declare one's own subjectivity in the face of overwhelming objective forces. Therefore it is no contradiction for the subject that inhabits a null an chaotic realm to employ the tools of conceptual art to declare its subjectivity.

The stain of subjectivity must promote itself with militant urgency and must be its own reason (with no 'reason' as such). Such a move marks the antidote to absolute objectivity, yet admits of the latter. That there can be no 'reason' is its reason, for lack of 'reason' - the latter having been done away with by rationality's drive towards truth having resulted in the proclamation of a null chaos - has left the subject with only one recourse. To Joan of Art, who doesn't exist. Such a recourse contains sedimented within it the historical development of relations which precisely makes it the only option open to the subject. As such the subject as monad which opens onto experience mourns the loss of possibility previously open to it through interaction with the art-object, yet at the same time, in light of the subjectivity it itself declares, is able to go into the world of praxis once more. This is not to offer redemption, but rather merely to posit Art as necessary to the understanding of experience, and moreover, to existence itself. Yet this cannot be taken



as a *fait accompli*. it is, rather, a mantle thrown to the artist and the philosopher in whose hands subjectivity jointly resides.

## **Conclusion**

The central aim of this study has been to restore the subject to philosophy in spite of, and not in place of, the thorough going objectivity proposed by 'Scientistic Philosophy'. At the same time it has been the intention to draw attention to the central role of Art in declaring that subjectivity.

It has now arguably been demonstrated throughout Chapters One to Three that despite its societal and actual objectivity, the subject can be said to exist, even in an objective realm. The process by which this subjectivity is permitted is describable as the shudder, following Adorno; the moment in which the subject is jilted into a recognition of its objective existence, and simultaneously of its status as the object which can uniquely perceive that objectivity via its sensual apparatus, which is itself objective. The subject is, precisely, the object that is aware of its objectivity. It is also fundamental to perception and as such cannot be eliminated from philosophy. It has been argued that this centrality of the subject to perception does not place the subject as a privileged being, but is, rather, a mere facet of wider existence, so far as that existence can be perceived philosophically.

Via a hyperbolic extrapolation of the negative potential of nihilism, both seen as a reduction to nothingness (undertaken as an exaggeration of the terms of Brassier's nihilism) and as a realm of chaos (approached in consideration of Meillassoux's 'contingency') it has been possible to conceive of a subject under conditions seemingly completely inhospitable to subjectivity, such that a counter argument from a nihilist or contingent perspective cannot be made. These conditions have been characterised not only as void, but as subject to constant change. This has been undertaken as a tactical manoeuvre such that the construal of the subject as here defined cannot be disregarded on the anti-correlationist grounds that subjectivity depends on the notion of a subject-centred

definition of being. In this light, the possibility of subjectivity has been declared as an Artistic statement, following on Adorno's characterisation of the 'shudder' as a mechanism by which the subject comes into being in front of the radically new art object, even in what Adorno characterised as a thoroughly objective society. Yet this notion of shudder has been altered to account for the thorough going reification of society and of the cultural sphere beyond that which even Adorno - in his negativity - perceived. As such, the art object, which is itself concatenated within the objectified social whole, without possibility of reversal, has been jettisoned, constituting a 'conceptual turn', in that the subject must declare itself, by way of an art conceptual statement; much as artists, following Duchamp, have declared various banal objects to be art.

Far from being an over hopeful restitution of the subject as central to existence, this process has been cast as ultimately objective, insofar as subjectivity has objective bases (the human subject's sensory apparatus and brain being materially constituted) with the result being that the subject's sensory apparatus is cast as a portal through which some phenomena - all of those that we can claim to have knowledge of - become apparent to the mind of the subject. In this sense it has been demonstrated that experience is in need of the subject-as-object, while existence itself may be endlessly multifarious, allowing for infinite possibilities, perhaps even existing simultaneously, and in contradiction of each other. As such, the notion that the philosophical subject and its necessary relation to the object must produce a subject-centred philosophy - as argued by Brassier and Meillassoux - has been challenged. The bounds of existence are potentially endless, though it is via the subject - as what is here termed the 'Retina of Experience' - that particular aspects of experience become known to philosophy. This in no way limits the boundless possibility that resides beyond the subject, elements of which may become known to the subject. As for what resides beyond and is unknown, or unknowable, philosophical speculation may be ventured, but will remain ultimately speculative, unless objectively identified, which would in any case bring the objects of such theses out of the

speculative realm as objects perceived by the subject-as-object, in conjunction with the object.

All the same, in a null and chaotic realm any vestige of subjectivity must be seen as just one of many contingent objective possibilities. Elevating 'subjectivity' beyond being a mere category of object - as has been seen throughout this study - becomes impossible in fact, once the privileged status of the subject as something other than object is jettisoned.

As such, the notion of the subject being something other than mere object is sustainable only as an Artistic declaration because, as has been argued, only as 'Art' can it ostensibly contradict reality, without undermining its basis. The extent to which this declaration can be voluntarily 'declared' is the extent to which the subject-as-object - occupying a null and chaotic realm, for the sake of the argument here laid out - has the propensity to make such a declaration or not. Yet this is not to say that the subject must wait to make the declaration, for the declaring subject will always think that it makes such a declaration voluntarily, as a gesture undertaken by a free subject. There is a Calvinist-style injunction upon the subject, for living as 'subject' - the 'life' that 'lives' of Chapter Two - requires that the declaration of subjectivity is made from somewhere. Even if all thought is random and chemical it still remains for the subject to decide to think its subjectivity, for decision is a form of thought, random and chemical or not. In this way unfreedom contains the possibility of its opposite, as Art, in a purely conceptual form - i.e. conceptual art shorn of its object outside of the subject - which takes to its extreme conclusion the declarations of Duchamp that 'anything can be art' and Beuys, that 'anyone can be an artist'.

In arguing to the extremes against the possibility of the subject's existence (and of existence *per se*) in Chapter One, and of the possibility of there being a rational ordering of physical matter (even as a form of nothingness, conceded to account for the

contradictory appearance of being that nihilism must countenance), a negative and chaotic reality has been put forward. The only remedy for which, in terms of the possibility of subjectivity, is arguably an extreme form of Art-conceptualism employed by the subject-that-is-object, so that it might declare its subjectivity. In this sense it has been argued that the subject's realisation of its apparent existence, and then of the dependence of that existence upon impressions conveyed by its sensory apparatus is akin to the subject realising its objectivity in the face of the novel artwork, which in its initial conveyance of perfection leads that subject to lose its subjective grounding, becoming part of the object, before then realising that it is *an object with the unique capacity to perceive its objectivity*. In a social whole and wider realm of existence that have been cast as seamlessly objective there can be no reliance for this moment of artistic realisation on anything but the last *apparent* vestiges of non-objective action: thought itself. Even given the objective nature of thought, so long as the possibility remains for the thought of subjectivity to be thought, subjectivity can be said to exist with the subject enacting the role of Adorno's artwork in its ostensible removal from the mere objective realm, shuddering at the fact of its own objectivity, before realising its status as the unique object which perceives its objectivity. In a word, the 'subject'.

To summarise: In Chapter One the subject has been thoroughly eradicated, with its semblance being accounted for as a mere part of the Shape of Nothingness. So much was conceded to nihilism that it appeared near impossible to restore the subject. In Chapter Two Adorno's shudder was approached as a means of conceiving of subjectivity in an objectified whole, which might have provided some refuge for the subject were it not for the posited thorough unfreedom of the social whole, which arguably does not even permit of truth emanating from the artwork. Consequently it was decided that the artwork must shed its object. In Chapter Three a radically conceptual form of art was conceived as the self-declaration by the subject of precisely its own subjectivity. This marks a 'conceptual

turn' as Art becomes purely conceptual, but also as subjectivity must be declared as an *Art-conceptual* gesture.

In the course of such an undertaking the notion of the Arche Fossil - indexing traces of phenomena which existed prior to molecular existence, and thereby signalling the apparent superfluity of the subject for philosophy - was approached via a collapsing of temporality (as a hyperbolic extension of Meillassoux's absolute contingency) so that the subject becomes a receptor of varied and chaotic processes which occur simultaneously. In this sense the perceived temporal distance of objects and phenomena has no bearing on the necessity of the subject to their being perceived. Their perception may be filtered via scientific apparatus which overcome a perceived temporality, yet this does not imply that the subject is not necessary for such phenomena to be directly perceived, anymore than it could imply that such phenomena cannot exist without the subject.

To conclude, this study conceives of a system whereby the subject can exist - as an art-conceptual declaration - in an entirely objective realm, as necessary to the perception of that realm such that that realm can be philosophically known, and yet *is not necessary to the existence* of that realm, or objects within that realm. It has further been stated that even in an inhospitable realm, which is both entirely objective - and, therefore, to all intents and purposes, 'null' - , and in which objects interact chaotically, the subject can be said to exist by way of a conceptual Art statement, which in no way contradicts the objective bases of subjectivity.

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