If We Are Compelled to Suffer: A Nihilist Intervention for the Left and Cultural Studies

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Abstract
Cultural studies need nihilism. The current canon of work (Butler, Foucault, Hooks, etc.) focuses too heavily on a political age and human condition that is rapidly being altered and replaced by the use of neoliberal technologies. A new understanding of ontology and politics is necessary to make sense of and challenge the changing technological orientation of human beings by what Deleuze has called a mutation of capital (Deleuze 2000: 90). It is not through institutional discipline that power permeates our being any longer but through our orientation to exist through and for neoliberal networks via our participation with internet technologies. Neoliberal technologies include and appropriates all bodies and experiences via their reduction to data and network flow; difference is no longer a tool of resistance. This work will assert that a move to a nihilist reading of ontology is what is missing from the work of cultural scholars and from current political movements interested in challenging the power of capital in the present. This work will attempt to build through nihilism a lens and an orientation via psychoanalytic theory and the work of Slavoj Žižek that offers resistance to neoliberal governance.

Keywords
Žižek, Psychoanalysis; Neoliberalism; Nihilism; Algorithmic Literacy; Antinatalism; Suicide; Freud; Dean; Posthumanism

Introduction

Cultural studies need nihilism. The current canon of work (Butler, Foucault, Hooks, etc.) focuses too heavily on a political age and human condition that is rapidly being altered and replaced by the use of neoliberal technologies. A new understanding of ontology and politics is necessary to make sense of and challenge the changing technological orientation of human beings by what Deleuze has called a mutation of capital (2000). This will require a multidisciplinary approach involving literature analysis, political theory, media theory, and psychoanalytic theory that moves to examine the ways that neoliberal governance makes use of internet technologies to shape and orient human identity, meaning, and ontology.

It is not through institutional discipline that power permeates our being any longer but through our orientation to exist through and for neoliberal networks via our participation with internet technologies. Neoliberal multiculturalism includes and appropriates all bodies and experiences via their reduction to data and network flow. Bodies and things are reduced to their potential to exist through configurations in network with information and resources or what Deleuze called machinic enslavement (Lazzarato 2014: 35). Difference no longer presents itself as a potential site for disruption but emerges as a site of appropriation for information technologies constantly involved in the repackaging of data possibilities. The shifting focus of emerging studies of identity such as queer theory, race studies, etc. in the last few decades offer a model of a human being that does not encompass the changing technological and political climate of the present. Performativity, as Judith Butler offers for instance, as a site of bodily resistance, speaks to a disciplinary model of power that is rapidly passing, and, today, simply mimics the works of algorithms, splicing data to ever further possibilities to increase possibilities of capital. Internet technologies allow for the expanse of capital to move from the realm of the economic to the social, producing a governance without boundaries. In short, government becomes the social landscape itself, and we become

system beings interacting with interfaces (Invisible Committee 2015: 110-11). Information technologies have undone the distinctions of work/leisure, public/private, and consumer/producer, making investment possible all over the world in a matter of seconds and transforming the most mundane leisure tasks into commodity by monetizing information. To think about resistance to neoliberalism requires that we push beyond concepts like representation and difference to think about identity in more complex ways. As Bruno Latour puts it in "Has Critique Run Out of Steam...", cultural theorists have fallen into a kind of paint by numbers critique, dispassionately tearing down cultural artifacts, and training the next generation of scholars with outdated tools intended for outdated wars (2004: 225-6). Nihilism is useful because it provides a lens to reimagine autonomy, participation, and meaning in ways that that may prove useful in making sense of challenging postfordist subjectivity or our present neoliberal orientation.

This is not to say that cultural studies is without the influence of nihilism. Numerous texts come to mind which take up related concepts of futurity, pessimism, and challenges to meaning making, and this work will borrow much from them. The anti-social movement in queer theory comes to mind as one important example, as does the work of numerous scholars of media such as Baudrillard and Nick Land, as well as the numerous scholars taking up the work of Deleuze in political and media-oriented texts. Similarly, the work of Freud and psychoanalytic theory contributes much to cultural critique in discussion of unconscious motivation and desire. This work will certainly draw from these texts but what this work will do in comparison is to attempt to create a theoretical lens and a positional base from nihilism to make sense of and to challenge our current political and technological moment of neoliberalism. It will be my assertion that a move to a nihilist reading of ontology is what is missing from the work of cultural scholars and from current political movements interested in challenging the power of capital in the present. This work will attempt to build through nihilism an orientation via psychoanalytic theory and the work of Slavoj Žižek that offers resistance to neoliberal governance.

Pessimism as the Last Human Hope

What modern works in nihilism can offer us is an unfailing pessimism that fails to be coopted. Pessimism is not counter-production, but it is anti-participation; it is a deliberate and universal failure to act. Information capital requires networks to continuously communicate flows on information and a failure to communicate is detrimental. Nihilism refuses mediation; pessimism is beyond appropriation. Nothing- as in the absence of a thing- cannot be fractured, splintered, and repackaged; it is not information, but its lack: it fails to continue. Pessimists refuse even the persuasion of life; nihilism is anti-natal.

There is much to explore in modern works of nihilism that I will contend could pay important dividends towards the creation of resistance theory and strategies against neoliberal technologies and appropriation. Principle among these is the failure to be persuaded. This is a central component to modern nihilist works and ontologies. Perhaps it is nowhere more present than in Carlo Michelstaedter's *Persuasion and Rhetoric,* posthumously published after the author's suicide. Michelstaedter's notion of being returns to the PreSocratics and to suffering. As Parmenides notes, human beings confuse ways of seeing with being itself, and Michelstaedter similarly believes that life is a state of lack where desire is never fulfilled as we are in a constant effort to fill the gaps of meaning and enjoyment by building our character with social functions that never quite add up to anything (2004: 8,47). The solution is, thus, to remove one's self from the state of rhetoric or social persuasion, and to accept the true conditions of life or what the author refers to as (self) persuasion: a resignation and self-power that comes from acceptance of our meaningless and unsatisfiable condition (2004: xvi).

This argument for resignation from persuasion and acceptance of suffering is evident in two works of nihilism defending suicide- *On Suicide* by Jean Amery (1999) and *Every Cradle is a Grave: Rethinking the Ethics of Birth and Death* by Sarah Perry (2014). Amery outlines the ways in which logic and life correspond to each other, leaving death, and thus suicide, completely outside the limits of reason (1999: 32-3).

This will be something to come back to as we consider the logic of algorithms and information capital, and what will be necessary to challenge them, recognizing where logic resides. Suicide is, after all, the absolute form of non-participation; it is not absorbable. Amery writes of the suicide that the he (or she) is the person who will never trust or be persuaded that life is worth it (1999: 91-2). The suicide, then, is just another form of the pessimist. As Michelstaedter puts it, if you bite into a crabapple, then spit it out (Michelstaedter 2004: 4). Amery and Perry are both concerned with the liberal humanist compulsion to force life and, thus, participation in neoliberal culture through the constant rescue of the suicide need be read along the compulsive medical attempts to prolong life even at the detriment of the patient. Perry's work, as well as that of David Benatar's (2006) *Better Never to Have Been* reach a step further and articulate an ethical argument against future procreation, citing the inevitable harm associated with existence. These works challenge liberal western notions that life is inherently good, arguing that such notions fail to consider the reality of social and biological conditions, which justify life and discourage suicide, presenting a case for an ethics of human extinction. If suicide is absolute non-participation, anti-natalism is ultimate and finite resistance. Extinction is opposed to annihilation; it transcends its logics: it refuses production and appropriation. Again, I think much can be drawn on to theorize possibilities of resistance here.

Ligotti's *The Conspiracy of the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror,* sees human existence as a kind of over evolved trap of suffering, where consciousness has grown far past the needs of human existence, forcing social and cultural life to be a process of its own betrayal, whereby human beings are a kind of animated puppet, who because of evolutionary restraints, can rarely put an end to their own disturbing condition, driven by innate and senseless biological forces (Ligotti 2011: 17). For Ligotti, the pessimist is he or she who precisely cannot accept and justify the absurdity of human life and the suffering that comes with it, and for whom hope can never spring (2011: 64). In *The Dust of this Planet: Horror of Philosophy*, Eugene Thacker pans out from a focus on the human to our black relationship to the universe. For Thacker, there are no higher values or a hope to reconcile a Zarathustran man, only a Schopenhaueran acceptance of the inevitability of suffering, and an inverted will to

nothing, recognizing the unavoidable and meaningless place human beings hold in an unconcerned universe (Thacker 2011: 19).   Thacker develops a notion of cosmic horror in a world and a universe beyond our understanding and with no relation to our human centric experience (2011: 80). Potentially, themes of horror from which these authors have drawn from, such as Ligotti's notion of the puppet (which I previously mentioned) and drawn from to make light of our relation to neoliberal technologies and to move towards possible strategies of resistance. I will continue such analysis later in this chapter and think there is a useful connection that these authors draw from such suspenseful states as suspended animation and possession that can translate quite nicely to our relationship with neoliberal technologies.

Although not specifically a nihilist work, I would almost mention Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death*, which, at the very least, has nihilist premises. Becker is consumed with the same line of inquiry or thought that Ligotti is, noting the logical reality of our suffering and our conscious ability to recognize it (Becker 2011: 2). While Ligotti is content to draw from sources such as Zapffe's *The Last Messiah*, examining the ways external cultural processes limit consciousness, Becker is concerned with the psyche and the internal, drawing heavily on Freud and Rank to draw a historical portrait of our subjective reconciliation of suffering and meaning. In summary, Becker feels that in order for human beings to cope with their condition of suffering and inevitable suffering, human beings concoct narratives of heroism to transcend their morality and subconscious fears of death (2011: 4). This notion of morality-transcending heroism will be useful to exploring our relationship and commitment to neoliberal technologies, and I will take this up shortly. It is also important to note that while Becker does take up Freud directly, all the works I mentioned either owe some debt to Freud and to psychoanalysis or are in conversation with works that take up similar causes. For this reason, I think it will be important to outline Freud's notion of the death drive briefly, and to address one work of political theory that already effectively makes use of his work to critique information capital and neoliberal technologies.

Freud and the Death Drive

Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is essentially a treatise on compulsion. Marked by a shift from the libido and sexuality, for which Freud is well known, towards man's existential plight, Freud contends that there must be drives beyond those that are life affirming. Freud postulates the notion of the death drive or drives to explain actions that human beings are compelled to take which do not accord to the principles of pleasure that he made so famous in his earlier works (Freud 2015: 79). Freud works to make sense of compulsive and repetitive behaviors that do not serve the motives of the pleasure and are furthermore, destructive:

> …the facts of the matter are not fully accounted by the effect of the motive forces of currently known to us remains to justify a compulsion to repeat; and this compulsion appears to us to be more primal, more elemental, more deeply instinctual than the pleasure principle, which it thrusts aside (2015: 83).

Despite clearly recognizing an important facet of human behavior and psychology, Freud's attempt to draw a larger theory of human nature would be problematic.

While Freud's notion of the death drive has been widely utilized and engaged by a number of scholars in a number of contexts and disciplines, it has been widely criticized as a theory of human nature, and serves more reasonably as a lens to address compulsion. This is probably because of Freud's reluctance to abandon notions of the libido and instinct in any meaningful way, trying, instead, to reconcile his newer findings with his older research (Becker 2011: 98). To summarize his position, Freud deduced that the function of the death drive was to deliver man to a previous state of human development prior to external disturbances (2015: 108). It is the human striving not to induce death but to preserve the conditions under which one can achieve death and ultimately return to inatimacy on one's own terms (2015: 110). The key in all this is a return to non-existence or more specifically, inatimacy, as the reason for

compulsive and destructive behavior that escapes the governance of the pleasure principle. In his own words,

> But what is the nature of the connection between the realm of the drives and the compulsion to repeat? At this point we cannot help thinking that we have managed to identify a universal attribute of drives- and perhaps of all organic life-that has not hitherto been clearly recognized, or at any rate no explicitly emphasized. A drive might accordingly be seen as *a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state*, which prior state the organism was compelled to relinquish due to the disruptive influence of external forces; we can see it as a kind of organic elasticity, or, if we prefer, as a manifestation of inertia in organic life. (2015: 108)

Here, we might acknowledge that Freud did reference the infancy of his studies in this line of thought and forgive him, as well as understanding moves away from Freud's death derives that theorists like Ernest Becker and others took, accepting the premises of Freud's notions of compulsion, while moving in other directions and towards other conclusions. For Becker, that would mean abandoning Freud's already contested notions of instinct and libido, while focusing on man's anxiety and existential existence. For this work, it is enough to notice the connection between compulsion and the ways in which human beings participate with neoliberal technologies, acknowledging that a number of possibilities arise which may help us make sense of the mechanics of the human/non-human relationship of neoliberal networks, as well as resistive possibilities. Jodi Dean's *Blog Theory* takes an important step in this direction, utilizing Lacan's reading of the Freudian death drive to create a lens to critique our participation with social media. It is worth exploring this impactful work in greater detail.

Jodi Dean's *Blog Theory* is a work about the reflexivity of communicative capitalism and how neoliberal technologies and our participation on the internet serve global capital. As Dean puts it, "Communicative capitalism is that economic-ideological form wherein reflexivity captures creativity and resistance so as to enrich the few as it placates and diverts the many" (2011: 4). Neoliberalism moves beyond the media

experience of a screen to processes of mediation through data mining, by way of algorithmic technologies. Participation on the internet is thus a multi-way flow whereby user's information choices are captured and whereby algorithms prompt further choices or opportunities for capture. It is the promotion of compulsive repetition that neoliberal technologies demand and this is precisely where the death drive is a useful theory to utilize as a lens to address our continuing participation. Dean utilizes Lacan's reading of Freud to explain that

> … desire and drive each designate a way that the subject relates to enjoyment. Desire is always a desire to desire, a desire that can never be filled, a desire for a *jouissance* that can never be attained. In contrast, drive attains *jouissance* in the repetitive process of not reaching it. Failure (or the thwarting of the aim) provides its own sort of success. If desire is like the path of an arrow, drive is like the course of the boomerang…The subject gets stuck doing the same thing over and over again because this doing produces enjoyment. Post. Post. Post. Click. Click. Click. (2011: 40)

Much like information capital, drives are not singular or of a single dimension. Just as information capital diverts, fractures, and repackages transgressive acts, drives produce more drives. Here neoliberal technologies mediate and make use of the human condition, and human participation tirelessly contributes to the generation of information capital, producing ever new possibilities in an endless loop of production. Human and machine become inseparable in the flows of information and capital in the networks of empire. In Dean's words,

> Lacan emphasizes that the drives are partial drives. He specifies this idea as 'partial with regard to the biological finality of sexuality.' I understand the point to refer to the variety of changing, incomplete, and dispersed ways subjects enjoy. Drives do not develop in a linear fashion from infant to adult. They fragment and disperse as the satisfy themselves via a variety of objects. As Copjec writes, 'It is as if the very function of the drive were this continuous opening up of small fractures between things.' Her language here is precise: the fractures are not of

things but between them; the parts that are objects of the drives are not parts of wholes but parts that appear in the force of loss as new expressions of a whole. (2011: 59)

Information capital is successful because it entraps the human psyche in repetitive loops that mimic its own mechanisms and functions. Our daily participation on the internet is the compulsive production of abstract monetizable data. And this is hardly a secret. It would be very difficult to ignore the custom advertisements and the lengthy end user agreements that we must scroll through even if we usually don't read them. Dean utilizes Slavoj Žižek's notion of ideology to reconcile this contradictory behavior.

Ideology is what we do, even when we know better (for example, I know that quizzes on Facebook are ingenious ways of collecting information from me and my friends, but I take them anyway). The psychoanalytic notion of fetishism provides a convenient shorthand: 'I know, but nevertheless… (2011: 5)

Indeed, a new reading of ideology is necessary that moves past liberal rationalist notions of false consciousness towards an identification of "beliefs underlying practice". What this offers is a route to address the apparent compulsive behaviors we engage in, in spite of ourselves, that "bind us to practices of domination" (Dean 2011: 5). Much of cultural theory has been engaged historically in efforts to undermine rationalism, as it has been used as a tool to challenge emerging positions which challenge logocentrism. Neoliberalism, however, presents deconstructionists with new challenges, transcending logocentrism and the confines of Western logic, emerging as an all-encompassing force of inclusion and monetization. Much of the work of cultural theory, with its focus on institutions and performativity, would be unable to imagine, yet alone challenge a type of multilateral power which appropriates and reduces all positions to its own financial logics. Žižek's notion of ideology addresses the logics of neoliberal technologies and our compulsive participation, which drive them. Psychoanalytic readings of ideology can persist beyond the historicist lens developed to contend with a former age of discipline, presenting tools for cultural theorists to use in the age of information capital.

Where psychoanalysis and nihilism converge is around the psychoanalytic concept of the lack. For Freud and Lacan, human life is inherently negative, always striving to fulfill desire or to reclaim a lost bond- and for Freud, this is what we all know in his discussions of libidos and parental obsession. For Michelstaedter and for nihilists, this is the shear impossibility of human fulfilment and the knowledge that despite all the efforts we take to belong or to succeed, that life cannot ever be whole or meaningful. For both psychoanalysts and nihilists, identities are merely the attempt to encapsulate a meaning or wholeness that despite relationships, social participation, and cultural life, cannot be complete. Anxiety and compulsion are the result of human convergence with the unfulfillable void we face at odds with a universe that is wholly indifferent to our being. Dean's work is only one possible application of many that could work to unearth the ways human beings and neoliberal technologies collaborate to serve the networks of empire. It is worthwhile to explore further what a turn away from the rational and towards underlying belief and compulsion could offer. I will explore these concepts further.

Digital Mediation and Death Transcendence

Ideology is not stronger than death. In *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker proclaims that what dominates the human condition is an attempt to offset the reality that we will die. For Becker, the history of humanity really comes down to heroic narratives or attempts to transcend death and the knowledge of its inevitability- some more hopeful than others (consider a life's work to create a vaccine versus participation in a religious war) (2011: 3-4). In chastisement of thinkers like Herbert Marcuse, Becker argues that this is not a condition to overcome, whereby ideology or future prospects such as the scientific, political, or economic might alleviate our existential condition (2011: 265). Becker asserts that even psychoanalysis can only bring man face to face with himself, but that this cannot address the fundamental questions of our existence, such as, "Why am I here?" or "Does life hold meaning" (2011: 192-94). Metaphysics is necessary to address human anxiety, and for Becker this means the full circle move from Freud to Kierkegaard, closing the existential loop, and developing a healthy condition of repression through a transcendental heroic expression.

Information capital can be read as the human attempt to close the loop between metaphysics and mortality through technology and economics. Algorithms create omnipotence through the mediation and generation of human knowledge, and networks, in their vastness, present information as immortal. Ernest Becker's renderings on the repression of death and the need for heroics to answer for our human existential condition offers a useful ontological framework from which to process the technological and scientific drive towards godliness that is the foundation and the result of information capital. It is an attempt not to overcome death, but to trap our existential condition and to repurpose it through a process of technological transcendence. This is the heroic complex in exacerbated technological, political, and economic terms. In *On Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud postulates that humanity will build a mechanical God to the heavens, and thereby science will replace religion altogether, as the cultural source of knowledge and belief. Freud was of course referencing the tremendous growth of technology and economy during the industrial revolution. And technology and capital certainly have not stopped growing, so much so, even, that one could argue it is not science that replaced God but liberal capital. After all, what good would technological innovation be if it did not serve capital? Here, neoliberal technologies almost certainly sit at the peak on innovation, marrying science, capital, and technology all through networks that can regulate everything from stock flows to information about the biology of individual bodies. When the majority uses such commonplaces as "they'll think of something" to answer for questions that plague the cultural psyche with uneasiness such as terrorism, climate change, or cancer, the "they" whom they are referring to is certainly not the church, but it is also not, specifically, science or government: it's the amalgam of neoliberal forces that make up empire. And why not? *They* have made possible everything from drones to instantaneous investment around the world, as well as numerous other technologies to measure things as slight as differentiations in an individual body, and in the atmosphere: everything is under control or more precisely, unified in the flow of the networks of empire. There is the well touted phrase in cultural studies by Mark Fisher that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world then the end of capitalism" but I think the end of the world is itself becoming harder to imagine and all that is left is empire (Shaviro 2013: 7). Information technologies impede and make use

of what The Invisible Committee calls "the spontaneously entropic, chaotic movement of the world", entrapping all to its orders. Indeed, neoliberalism has no horizon.

One need only look to the impressive amount of emerging popular titles that explore our changing perception of our human experience. Films like Chappie (Blomkamp 2015), for instance, which offers the idea that even death can be overcome by technology, as we might simply download our brains into robot bodies when our own mortality catches up to us. *The Matrix* (1999) is, of course, another popular example, positing the idea that we could live entire lives simulated by computers. The graphic novels *Alex + Ada* (2013) and *Ancestor* (2016), AMC's hit television program *Humans* (Vincent & Brackley 2015-) , HBO's critically acclaimed *Westworld,* USA's Mr. Robot, and recent feature films Big Hero 6 (2014) and *Downsizing*, all suggest that we are adapting to living a new kind of cybernetic reality without limits. The popular apocalyptic imagination that so recently dominated popular culture (Walking Dead, Children of Men, 12 Monkeys (2015), Wall-E) is being replaced by a notion of technological omnipotence and salvation. As Curtis White puts it, the ideology of the present is shaped by a twofold commitment to an inevitable technocratic reality in which all things exist to stabilize a world of techno capital and in which all phenomena can be explained by their mechanics- a becoming of robotics, if you will (2015: 16). The human/non-human divide is failing.

Posthuman vs Unhuman

Posthumanism is the attempt by critical theory to make sense of the reconfiguration of bodies and non-bodies within neoliberal networks. Theorists of such varieties contend to move past more basic notions of causation, rationalism, and anthropocentrism, to realize the ways in which people and things emerge within assemblages dictated by disperse flows of power and information (Bennet 2010; Barad 2003; Braidotti 2014). It is a recognition of, but a step beyond the anthropocentrism and semiologies of modernist and postmodernist critique towards a recognition of the ways in which humans and nonhumans emerge in collaborative regimes of production. As Karen Barad puts it,

There is an important sense in which practices of knowing cannot be fully claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part. Practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather they are mutually implicated (2003: 829).

What posthumanism does particularly well is to locate the human within the unique bind of information and resource flow which neoliberal technologies reimagine his/her being within. Posthumanism rightly challenges rational/humancentric models, which cannot account for the ways that human activity and work emerge within networks of human and nonhuman actors. Thus, human knowledge and experience are integrated and produced within these empiric configurations of capital. These premises are quite agreeable and not at all removed from the assessment of neoliberal technologies that I have forged thus far. However, the conclusions and possibilities that posthumanists have drawn from these grounds do not appear to be as reasonable to me.

To address and to challenge the human/non-human assemblage of things, posthumanists like Rosi Braidotti and Jane Bennet make a turn towards Spinoza and monism. It is within the essence or vitality of life itself, that these authors locate human agency and a possible resistance to neoliberalism. A reformation of scientific disciplines, as well as those in the humanities, is called for by these authors to address and challenge the appropriation of human and nonhuman lives by capital. Braidotti writes,

Post-anthropocentrism is marked by the emergence of 'the politics of life itself' (Rose, 2007). 'Life', far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralized as a pre-established given, is posited as process, interactive and open-ended. This vitalist approach to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life – both organic and discursive – that has traditionally been reserved for *anthropos*, that is to say *bios,* and the wider scope of animal and non-human life,

also known as *zoe. Zoe* as the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself (Braidotti 2006, 2011b) stands for generative vitality. It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains. *Zoe* – centered egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the post- anthropic turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded and unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of Life that is the logic of advanced capitalism. It is also an affirmative reaction of social and cultural theory to the great advances made by the other culture, that of the sciences. (2014: 60)

While, again, posthumanism does seem to take many first important attempts in addressing questions of agency and the ways in which human bodies are both dominated by and exert domination over each other, animal life, and the environment through neoliberal assemblages, there is much to question about posthuman solutions. In fighting what Braidotti refers to as the necropolitics of capitalism (borrowed from Mjembe), she and other posthumanists invoke a vitalist framework to repair what they think is a severed human connection to the earth and to life by capital (2014: 122). This, as evidenced by the section above, is referred to by the author as "unsentimental" and a move towards connecting or uniting the sciences and the humanities. For a nihilist, and I would think for many scientists, monism would not nearly be as agreeable or as removed from emotion as Braidotti might hope. It seems to, in some ways, mirror the historicist hopes of cultural theorists locating the problematic aspects of injustice to the social realm, while ignoring any biological possibilities in human beings. Furthermore, the capitalist logics of human dominion seem to far surpass the realm of capital, and are found in a number of religious, social, and cultural belief systems. To attribute the nature of environmental domination and necroworship simply to the reductionist logics of capitalism seems to be ignoring a number of ideological systems which work to ground and sustain its dominion. If we locate necropolitics within deeper cultural narratives, we put ideology at stake and Braidotti's system of zoe into question, because as I've outlined, nihilist works such as Becker's poke serious holes in the culpability of human beings to commit to anything that cannot assuage their death anxieties. It is thus not only unlikely that zoe would serve as a palatable alternative, but it seems that Braidotti has seriously overestimated the agency of human beings, while

ignoring major flaws in design such as compulsion and fear, which serve as reasonable causes for the adherences to cultural myths and ideologies, all of which capitalism appropriates and uses to ground and sustain its dominance. In short, capitalism works because it appropriates and monetizes human compulsion and situates itself in cultural narratives which serve the deepest mechanics of the human psyche, assuaging death anxieties. If we wish to become unsentimental, or have any hope for challenging neoliberalism, it seems far more reasonable to begin from the space of non-participation that begins with the acceptance of the cold and scientific indifference of the cosmic horror that Thacker writes about so enthusiastically. Life is a poor solution to necropolitics.

Posthumanism recognizes the need for new commitments beyond the identity politics of post modernism. It is unclear, however, what identity might mean to posthumanists. As I've outlined, posthumanists put a great deal of effort into a critique of the failures of a humancentric framework and are committed to a move beyond semiotics. It is difficult to say just where significations such as race, class, or sexuality come out in the posthuman revolution and what that means for individual agency, if that is even still conceivable. Braidotti writes,

> Becoming-posthuman consequently is a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of one's sensorial and perceptual co-ordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call the self. This is in fact a moveable assemblage within a common life-space that the subject never masters nor possesses but merely inhabits, crosses, always in a community, a pack, a group or a cluster. For posthuman theory, the subject is a transversal entity, fully immersed in and immanent to a network of non-human (animal, vegetable, viral) relations. The *zoe*-centered embodied subject is shot through with relational linkages of the contaminating/viral kind which inter-connect it to a variety of others, starting from

the environmental or eco-others and include the technological apparatus. (2014: 193)

It is clear from posthuman texts that posthumanists think that there is a kind of empowerment and an epistemic privilege that comes from recognizing one's embeddedness in networks of human and non-human assemblages. However, it is entirely unclear how this power might be utilized and how this knowledge could be put into action to challenge neoliberalism. Vitalism, here, appears to be an afterthought and an attempt to conjure a force of nature outside the bounds of capital, although it remains unclear how this could be possible. Agency appears to go through a kind of double loss, first by neoliberal embeddedness in concert with nonhuman actors for means that produce one's own captivity, and second to zoe, which imagines life as a collective force of imminence rather than through individual subjectivtity. Within vitalist ontologies, things and people just kind of arise, as Žižek puts it in critique of Bennet (2015: 15).

Posthumanism presents a number of tactical difficulties and due to its monist commitments, it appears to be more of a metaphysical project then it would like to admit. The problems of agency that arise in the human/nonhuman assemblages that neoliberalism generates remain beyond the scope of posthuman theorizing. Nonparticipation eludes posthumanism, as human meaning and value are simply passed off to monism, and compulsion is thoroughly under dealt with as ideology and processes of the human psyche are overly reduced to capitalist production.

Nihilism begins with nonparticipation. Compulsion is the inner drive of life that forces one to continue and endure unjust suffering. Braidotti unashamedly offers us zoe, but is unwilling to scrutinize life itself, rather leaning on the necropolitics of capitalism to justify its value in opposition. Only the pessimist offers an unabashed refusal to participate. Life is compulsion; it is the drive to continue and to produce. Neoliberalism offers us one model of this, and vitalism another. But for the latter not to contribute to the former, we must be willing to undermine the forces of life which make neoliberalism possible. Compulsion is the mechanics of neoliberalism and it is the foundation of life itself; pessimism refuses compulsion because it refuses participation. Within nihilism

lies the possibilities for meaningful resistance. A different assessment of the human/nonhuman bind will be necessary, and I will now turn to Ligotti and to Thacker to explore how nihilist analyses of the genre of horror might be borrowed to address this problem.

The Algorithm as Undead Horror

The scene has been set. A fascination looms around the increasing capabilities and around the ever-expanding role that technology plays in human lives. But there is an accompanying dread and anxiety lurking behind the optimism of each new technological innovation. Hacking, technological warfare, and, even human obsoletion are not uncommon fears. Information technologies are closing the circle between human life and infinity, but where does humanity stand? Ligotti writes of the supernatural horror motif atmosphere as,

> Atmosphere is created by anything that suggests an ominous state of affairs beyond what our senses perceive and our minds can fully comprehend. It is the signature motif that Schopenhauer made discernible in pessimism – that behind the scenes of life there is something pernicious that makes a nightmare of our world. That is something, this ominous state of affairs beyond what our senses perceive and our minds can comprehend (2011: 151).

This is the cosmic horror that Thacker describes- a universe of indifference in which we are not welcome. Atmosphere is then something that is specific to human beings. Ligotti writes, "It must be remembered that the atmosphere of a supernatural world and its horror exists only in the human imagination. There is nothing like it in nature, nor can nature provoke it" (2011: 158). Atmosphere is, thus, the product of consciousness and the human attempt to make meaning: "We are alone in our minds with the atmosphere of a supernatural world and its horror. We are both its creators and what it has created – uncanny things that have nothing to do with the rest of creation." (2011: 158). Our human experience in the universe has always been uncanny- we live according to our own perspectives, constantly at risk of exposing our realities. What I'd like to propose is that information capital has created a double bind: an appropriation of our

consciousness via a layer of technological mediation through which our uncertain and existential attempts at meaning making face a second simulation. Our participation with information technologies is not indifferent- far from it: atmosphere is no longer an unknown pernicious force, but consciousness trapped, extracted, and made omnipotent through the network flows of empire. In short, the neoliberal horizon is atmosphere realized and we are made constant participant to its uncanny procedures which appropriate the simulations of our consciousness through a mediation of algorithmic technologies through which we experience ourselves.

Here, I must disagree that there is a predicament of human and non-human or human and thing, as posthumans would have us believe; what information technologies encompass is all too human; it is unhuman. The distinction between human and nonhuman within neoliberal networks could be more adequately imagined as conscious vs unconscious with much more technology evolving to trap, appropriate, and simulate conscious production to generate more algorithmic possibilities for information capital. In this way an algorithm is alive- it participates in activities of human consciousness, albeit at a highly accelerated rate and capacity, but it is not living, and it is without its own cognizance: it is undead. The algorithm will also not stop without command: it continues ceaselessly in the projects of data retrieval, packaging, and commodification. The algorithm is unhuman. It participates in the network's flow of information and resources, constantly generating production from information long after the user has surrendered it. The network thus transgresses the living and it is beyond death; consciousness is now infinite, and nothing is beyond its reach. Ligotti borrows some of the opening lines of H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulu,

> The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either

go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (2011: 157)

Information technologies have closed the loop between man and infinity, and thus, between man and cosmic horror. The neoliberal horizon is atmosphere materialized: we have realized omnipotence and we cannot escape. The pernicious and indifferent force of the universe is consciousness itself. Nature is only an aside. There is no tether. Our experience is, now, infinite.

What is uncanny or terrifying about algorithmic technologies is their similarity to human patterns of thought. They appear alive through their animation and through their production. But this is terrifying on a second level perhaps, not because they mimic us, but because we mimic them. We realize the simulation and our compulsive and futile attempts to create personhood out of an indifferent and purposeless state. Ligotti describes human beings, themselves, in terms of animated puppets, or wind-up toys:

Wound up like toys by some force – call it Will, élan vital, anima mundi, physiological or psychological processes, nature, or whatever – organisms go on running as they are bidden until they run down. In pessimistic philosophies only the force is real, not the things activated by it. They are only puppets, and if they have consciousness may mistakenly believe they are self-winding persons who are making a go of it on their own. (2011: 18)

Algorithms continue ceaselessly as if driven by some innate animated force; is this not the same for human beings? Caught in flows of network production, algorithms continue to generate further data revenue, just as human beings continue to work, sleep, reproduce, vote, etc., despite indifference towards the process. This is the second bind I refer to: atmosphere has a face and we are not sure if it is our own or the computer screen. Thacker's reading of the demon as a figure of horror literature (Thacker 2011: 26-27) is, thus, complicated further if we try to read networks in this way. Transcending an unknown other or limitation, the network becomes the very realization of human omnipotence through the raising of human consciousness to the level of Godlike status, where the flows of information capital encapsulate all

possibilities of knowing. It is, in turn, also the maximization of human suffering as consciousness is cosmic horror.

There is an opportunity to make sense of our unhuman predicament through Schopenhaur's negative will. Networks are ceaseless, and information is endless; what they project is the omnipotent and omnipresent terror of consciousness, as life marches on driven by some innate and indifferent force. Information technologies are then a work of true horror. An encapsulation of man in his faulty condition, defenseless and naked for all to see. Posthumanists are wrong when they appeal to life as a positive force which can somehow undermine man's necropolitics; life is the force aimed solely at projecting us to death and ensuring an endurance through the injustice of nature. Consciousness was the only challenge to its inevitability, but it has been refashioned through neoliberal logics as a technological force to generate evermore horror, engulfing all of our creative capacities in its network flows, and projecting us blindly into the cosmic horror. Neoliberal technologies are thus not unlike the ooze monster so famous in works of horror. Thacker describes one particular rendition: "…Caltiki proceeds to engulf houses, cars, animals, and people, able to grow and divide itself in the process" and with "no motive, no vendetta, no program of action, other than simply that of 'being ooze.' This anonymity is matched by the affective sliminess of Caltiki, as if it in itself were literally the bowels of the Earth." (Thacker 2011: 90) Here, the bowels of the earth can be substituted with the bowels of life via compulsion and made possible through the vehicle of consciousness. In a second example, "in 'Black Gondolier' oil is described as an animate, creeping ooze that already is on the surface, and that immanently courses through all the channels of modern industrial civilization, from the central pipelines feeding the major cities to the individual homes and cars that populate those cities" (2011: 92).

Consciousness could very easily stand in as a double for the ooze, flowing between bodies and algorithms within neoliberal networks. Algorithms mimic the compulsion of life and the unhuman/human bind presents itself in a lack of distinction through consciousness. Similarly, "… ooze is not just a biological amoeba, and not just the mud of the Earth; here ooze begins to take on the qualities of thought itself."

(Thacker 2011: 91) But again, is the problem simply our relation to non-human processes in an unequitable and exploitative technological bind? I think what is revealed about our human lives and practices speaks to much deeper questions about human nature, compulsion, and ethics. Life is not a good thing. Nihilism provides an opportunity to excavate this predicament more thoroughly and the genre of horror a number of literary themes to explain the unhuman, for which I've only outlined a possible few for the purposes of example. Now that I've put a focus on possible lenses to understand the issues at hand, I will turn to draw possible forms of resistance that can be drawn through nihilism.

Killing the Machines

Suicide is anti-compulsion. Antinatalism is anti-neoliberalism. Suicide defies the logic of life and thus the logic of capitalism. Neoliberal technologies are based on the compulsive codes of life and suicide breaks every one of them. Furthermore, antinatalism, or the refusal to reproduce, defies the logic of information capital to generate and produce, resisting neoliberal networks by stunting flows of resources and information. Suicide is not the Bartlebyean "I'd prefer not to," which would simply divert flows of capital elsewhere, it is a refusal to exist at all; it is nothing. Nihilism is beyond appropriation because it is beyond preference.

Cultural theory has failed because it has left the single most powerful piece of liberal humanism untouched- the notion that life is inherently good. Notice that my word choice was "good" and not "valuable," because these are two profoundly different things that are often at odds, but this common conflation in Western thinking is not often troubled by cultural theorists. For example, I could say that life isn't good because it involves suffering, but that suffering creates a kind of meaningful and valuable experience, which Perry notes as a common cultural belief (2014: 41). I will not address the question of life's value because this is a much larger metaphysical question and one with no certain answer: however, I will contend that from nihilism we can take a kind of pessimism that denies and detests the logics of suffering and oppression at all cost, which does seem to, in effect, place a high value on peace and autonomy. Western

ideologies, most notably liberal humanism, which prop up neoliberal rule, depend on inequality, injustice, and righteous violence, which undeniably cause harm. Pessimism is ideology proof, and for the nihilist, nothing could justify the suffering that human beings inevitably go through as a result of being born. To understand that life is harmful, however, does not amount to an indifference that would proclaim capitalism as just another form of harm, as pessimists refuse all argument and all coercion to accept that any form of life could be good. Nihilists would thus find a vitalists claim to embrace life as absolutely terrifying because life is inherently the reason we are forced to suffer. Historicists unnecessarily limit their claims of evil and injustice to cultural institutions when nature is the cruelest master of them all, providing illness, inequality, and inevitably, death. We are anxious and compulsive because we are limited and vulnerable animals according to nihilist thinkers. Because cultural theorists often fail to take this final step of inquiry into suffering, often out of distrust for science or for fear of any absolute description of human beings, they insert a value of good where there inherently is none, and, thus, lack the adequate tools to undo the deep hooks neoliberalism has extended into our lives through the appropriating of human compulsion. Cultural theorists often mimic the logics of liberal humanism, in that abuses are bad because they rob a person of the good in terms of rights that they ought to be entitled to, but this is unnecessary and costly, because as we've seen in the last decade, empire is often the first to hand out human rights protections, ushering all bodies, albeit at varying speeds, into the neoliberal horizon. Pessimism refuses all of these pretenses. The suicide realizes that life does not add up with human rights, social success, class belonging, or any other model of the self- Western or otherwise. Life is a cruel series of sufferings that doesn't add up to anything. As such, cultural theory is entangled in a costly defense of life when it fails to engage pessimism and the compulsion of life is what makes neoliberalism possible. Suicide refuses life.

David Benatar's *Better Never to Have Been* rests upon a simple exercise of logic and ethics. Benatar recognizes the undeniable- that life necessitates suffering and that if one isn't born then one remains not only free of suffering but free of any expectations of good or enjoyment, thus the never born are not robbed of anything but pain. It would be reasonable to say that nihilism begins from this position of life as undue suffering

and that being born is, in short, very bad luck. The question that follows is then what to do about it. For Benatar, one answer is simple: stop having children on the ethical grounds stated above. For the suicide, it is to immediately cease living on grounds that the suffering found in human life cannot be offset by any personal, religious, or cultural attempts at meaning or enjoyment. The suicide and the antinatalist are beyond metaphysics and beyond reconciliation with reason and cultural mediation. They hold the only position which may undermine the logics of life, reason, and capital which underscore neoliberal order. In short, they are beyond appropriation.

Matthew McConaughey's Rust Cole sums up the essence of the modern nihilist position in True Detective when he states,

> I'd consider myself a realist, alright? But in philosophical terms I'm what's called a pessimist... I think human consciousness is a tragic misstep in evolution. We became too self-aware. Nature created an aspect of nature separate from itself - we are creatures that should not exist by natural law... We are things that labor under the illusion of having a self, that accretion of sensory experience and feelings, programmed with total assurance that we are each somebody, when in fact everybody's nobody... I think the honorable thing for our species to do is to deny our programming. Stop reproducing, walk hand in hand into extinction - one last midnight, brothers and sisters opting out of a raw deal. (Pizzolatto 2014)

While the raw deal is precisely what Benatar has offered- a life of inevitable suffering that none of us chose and which can never be balanced by attempts at meaning-making, as Michelstaedter makes clear--we could also extend this thinking to regimes of suffering in the network, and the oppression which presents itself as life, to us, neoliberalism. The suicide wishes to surpass the horizon of suffering and critical theorists wish to challenge neoliberalism, not often recognizing a connection. The difference is, of course, that suicides see the underlying causes and mechanisms of human malfunction that make tyranny and injustice of all kinds possible via the faulty, decaying, and compulsive state of human beings, whereas those interested in political change focus too heavily on the instruments of oppression themselves. Antinatalism

and suicide are both heavily contested positions in Western culture, with suicide being far more controversial because of its overt and disturbing presentation of resistance to life. Not coincidentally, I will then argue that suicide is as readily policed as it is because of its radical potential. I would like to examine this more thoroughly.

Suicide is a threat because it works to undo the liberal humanism which capital emerges from, in that it questions precisely that life is good. This justification actively works to shield the compulsion that causes human beings to endure the inevitable suffering of life and which neoliberal technologies appropriate to ensnare human participation. Therefore, all efforts must be taken to delegitimize suicide as something that exists beyond the realm of rationalism. Amery writes that that is not even imaginable because logic is life itself (1999:14). Cultural theorists concerned with identity should be perking up because the move to deem an identity that questions the logics of liberal capitalism as insane or criminal is precisely what was done to gay, transgender, and other minority bodies in the United States and elsewhere. Furthermore, radicalism itself is often discussed in terms of maladjustment, unhappiness, and moral delinquency in the news media, public education, and by other influential institutions. Suicide is the ultimate act of radicalism because it undermines the ability of institutions of power to determine how and in what ways bodies will be used. It is to literally throw one's self outside the logics of life and resource flow which circulate bodies and capital. Authority must act on life to maintain power, but life itself predicates authority when we assume it has virtue. Suicide is the opportunity to undo the basis from which power emerges. For this reason, it will be policed and absurdly so.

Suicide is not illegal in the United States, but curiously assisted suicide is, giving it the unique distinction of being the only act for which assistance is a crime while the act itself remains legal. It is the predominant claim that suicide is caused by untreated depression: however, Sarah Perry notes that there is little evidence to support this claim beyond suicidal behavior being listed as a symptom of depression, thus creating a self-fulfilling cycle of diagnosis (2014: 147). Enormous efforts have been taken to mark suicide as taboo, unacceptable, and something that must be prevented at all cost. Anti-suicide groups have succeeded in creating a popular rhetoric that all

suicides can be prevented, thus creating a culture where suicide is heavily policed on an individual level, and where suicide must happen privately in a demoralized position, devoid of respect and dignity (2014: 146-148). This humanist liberal shift to individual and cultural policing is evident in a recent cultural phenomenon *13 Reasons Why* on Netflix, which follows the clues left by a suicide, as the characters lament how they could have intervened and stopped the act from occurring. Suicide is depicted graphically and as a harm to the teenager who was portrayed as a tragic and immature person who needed to be saved. Popular examples like this one help to create a culture that is ever vigilant against suicide, despite suicide not being a crime, and freedom being an ideal of importance in Western cultures. Preferential ethicists will argue that the limited number of suicides compared to the general population evidence a strong value on life, but this completely ignores the heavy social emphasis against suicide, the barricades to access, and the high physical and social cost of being rescued and forced into treatment (Perry 2014: 157-8). Perry notes that line of thinking relies on a faulty symmetrical model of human choice that fails to recognize the higher value human beings intrinsically place on loss rather than gain (2014: 157-8). The heavy focus on the suicide's wellbeing and, specifically, depression shifts focus away from power and the economic, social, and cultural conditions and injustices that often cause individuals to have poor feelings about being alive. While this individualist view of suicide shows remarkable respect and adoration for life, it completely ignores autonomy, ethics, and personal choice, in consequence serving neoliberal ideology, while maintaining the flows of information and resources which require our continued participation. Life itself must be examined, undermined, and reimagined for a meaningful notion of agency to arise and to present a meaningful challenge to neoliberal order which appropriates its powers. Suicide presents this opportunity for subversion, challenging the compulsion to sustain life. Any revolutionary proposal that maintains an unquestioned notion of the goodness of life thus relegates the human to the horizons of capital.

This cultural policing of suicide is, of course, only doubled or compounded by evolutionary and biological restraints. Ligotti comes remarkably close to Freud; nihilism and psychoanalysis show their point of intersection when Ligotti writes that the real problem of human beings is an evolved consciousness that supersedes our physical

purposes (2011: 28). Designed to work, procreate, sleep, and die, human beings find themselves with enormous abstract reasoning capabilities beyond their need. With the ability to recognize that life is painful and without demonstrable meaning, human beings are forced to find ways to bind or dull their intelligence or suffer enormous existential pains (Ligotti 2011: 41). Neoliberal technologies are, thus, so successful because they sublimate human consciousness and compulsion through constant participation with algorithmic technologies. On the issue of meaninglessness and the problem of consciousness, Ligotti and Becker see eye to eye, but while Becker finds this drive for meaning inevitable, arguing that the need must be filled (metaphysically reconciling Freud with Kierkegaard), and seeing the impossibility of human fulfillment on a social level, Ligotti contends for and hopes that we might take the credo of McConaughey's solution seriously and, simply, walk off the edge of existence. Furthermore, but in more descriptive terms, Ligotti contends, as Freud did, that we often live on past recognition of suffering because of inner drives compelling us to motion, not unlike a windup toy or a puppet animated by some indistinct and unyielding force. (2011: 54) What better way to describe Freud's notion of compulsion than with a windup toy, acknowledging that compulsion is what binds our bodies and our minds to the repetitive horror of a mundane existence. We march on knowing very well that existence is hell and that extinction is the only answer to our predicament, but we are biologically compelled to live, and stuck helplessly, in motion. (2011: 37) There are of course a number of coping strategies, both scientific and otherwise, that human beings apply to try to make their lives tolerable, but ultimately, they don't add up to anything, thus Becker's call for a metaphysical solution. (Becker 2011: 275-7) To return to a previous inquiry, for example, Ligotti contends that transhumanists or posthumanists who seek either the scientific logos of tomorrow or a reimagining of our positionality cannot get around the evolutionary blunder of consciousness and realize that life is uncurable because it is inevitably going nowhere. (Becker 2011: 103) It is too difficult to accept extinction as the reasonable solution to this insufferable quagmire of existences, and from psychoanalysis we have many lenses to examine why. Compulsion is what binds us to a raw deal for which we know better.

Suicide undermines compulsion and presents the opportunity to examine how the logics of life, which are appropriated, and which sustain and define the logics of neoliberal technologies, may be resisted or broken. I am not advocating for suicide: however, I think it is clear from the arguments I've presented that I am not going to devalue or challenge it as an individual's course of action.   Suicide has already been used as a method of resistance, e.g. Buddhist monks who lit themselves on fire in protest in South Vietnam and American Indians seeking to avoid slavery by the regimes of Columbus. I am arguing that suicide can and should be utilized as an epistemic tool to examine how the logics of life via compulsion can be undermined as a radical example of non-participation. Psychoanalysis provides us with the tools to do so.

Suicide is the ultimate example of Žižek's radical act. Borrowed from Lacan, the radical act is that which creates liberatory possibilities by creating a break or a space of doubt in the sociosymbolic order. As Henry Krips puts it, the act is an "encounter with the Real that disturbs the subject to the point of threatening not only the dissolution of his or her symbolic order and speech, but also (therefore) of a subjectivity that is grounded in the pattern of un-speech that punctuates what he or she says" (2012: 314). It is the dissolution or the space of doubt caused by the act that one is afforded the opportunity to reimagine possibilities that were once fixed through existing logics. The act is something that one is compelled to take and for which the results are uncertain. Suicide, for example, is often quickly written off, once the initial shock has dissipated, as an act of depression, as I discussed. However, its disturbance often has numerous other effects, such as the fear of contagion, political awareness, etc. What I am arguing is that within this discussion or space that suicide creates, we might look further at the logics of life which cultural theorists seem to take for granted when theorizing resistance towards neoliberalism. For Žižek, *the act* is a political action aimed at liberation from the inescapable matrix of liberal democracy within which, "any move against nationalism, fundamentalism, or ethnic violence ends up reinforcing Capital and guaranteeing Democracy's failure" (Dean 2011: 2). Here Žižek argues that in accepting global capitalism, the Left remains trapped within a democratic fundamentalism which denies possibilities of radical or progressive potential (Dean 2011: 13). I will go further and contend that in failing to challenge the liberal western tenants that life is inherently

good, we are unable to challenge the compulsion of human bodies which remains as the foundation and serves as the driving force of networks and neoliberal technologies. To take one's life can be an act of resistance against empire, refusing to participate in the symbolic, and undermining the compulsion of human life which endlessly produces data capital.

Suicide is the act par excellence for Lacan, according to Žižek, precisely because it does not only reshape the subject, it is their extinction. "The act differs from an active interaction (action) in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent): the act is not simply something I 'accomplish'- after an act I'm literally 'not the same as before" (Žižek 2008: 51). One thus undergoes an act rather than completes it, as what is at the heart of the act is an "irreducible risk"- the act arises out of pure negation and everything is secondary to the act (Žižek 2008: 51). The act as resistance to neoliberalism is refusal to participate in the symbolic; the production of data capital. It is non-being. Suicide is a wrench in the machine; antinatalism turns it off. Human extinction is opposed to neoliberal annihilation.

Conclusion: Nihilism as Anti-Compulsion

Neoliberalism relies on human compulsion. For this reason, it is unrealistic to rely on the work of cultural studies, so often associated with deconstruction and humanism to offer useful models for rebellion.   A new ontological position is necessary for cultural studies to address human being in its state of mediation by information technologies. Nihilism provides an ontological framework that can unpack the ways in which human behavior propagates and serves neoliberal technologies. It is my contention that the tools to understand human compulsion are prevalent in psychoanalytic theory and that nihilism can be used to further serve their intent and to develop strategies of resistance to information capital by presenting a coherent conception of human mechanics and human agency. Nihilism presents an ethics which matches the enduring condition of human consciousness in which information technologies are grounded and multiply.

Cultural Studies has been unable to properly address or challenge the ways that neoliberal technologies appropriate human behavior because of a failure to address human life on a mechanical level. At a mechanical level, nihilism reveals human life as horror: compulsion without purpose. It is compulsion that information technologies require to generate more data and to maintain the flows of capital. Deconstruction is an act of compulsion, fracturing, splintering, and ultimately producing more possibilities for neoliberal capital, rather than challenging its logics. Neoliberal technologies are, thus, performative themselves, creating, generating, and reproducing through repetition and through transgression of their own laws. By recognizing the mechanics of human compulsion and the ways in which information capital appropriates creativity, mimicking their compulsive behavior, human agency can be reimagined in ways that might challenge our tacit relationships and participation with neoliberal technologies.

Nihilism offers the strongest ethical position of non-participation and offers a base for developing methods of anti-compulsion, thus providing a number of possible lenses for addressing the human/nonhuman bind for which we find ourselves engaged with information technologies. I have only begun to explore these possibilities and I think there is evidence here to support the importance of developing nihilist ideas further in cultural theory as possible resistance strategies for the left. Nihilism provides the most compelling attempts to break with the compulsions that tether human being to undue suffering and it only makes sense that we work to explore how these possibilities could serve to challenge neoliberal technologies and the logics of empire. Neoliberalism is annihilation, but it is *not* extinction: it is the reduction of all beings to capital. Nihilism, in contrast, challenges life as an unjust experience of suffering, and as such, provides the opportunity to diagnose and to resist neoliberalism as a multiplying force of human consciousness and horror.

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