# TOWARDS A NEW ENVISIONING OF UBERMENSCH: A TRANS-NIETZSCHEAN RESPONSE TO NIHILISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS by research

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June 2017

# DEDICATION

Dedicated to N.C., who is valued above all else.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to my parents, Sharon and Clive, and my brother Dom for all the encouragement and support. To Sarah for tolerating my 3am eureka moments and the many hours locked away scribbling with foamy-mouthed abandon.

Many thanks to Dr David Cheetham for his guidance throughout, and for the many tangents into literature, film and music.

My enormous gratitude to Luke Fox and the staff and students of Leeds Trinity University, who listened to my ramblings with both patience and concern.

To all my friends and extended family – thanks for keeping me sane by not asking "how's the thesis going?"

Special thanks to Dr. Milo Aukerman for giving us Hope.

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# INTRODUCTION

## *0.1: The Problem with Nietzsche and Nihilism*

When Nietzsche declared the death of God his words fell on deaf ears. Dying penniless and insane, it was not until some years later that his writing found a popular audience. Much of Nietzsche's focus was on the concept of nihilism, a literal understanding of a universe devoid of meaning. Nietzsche's declaration of the death of god was to precede 200 years of nihilism, after which the rise of ubermensch, a unique and abstracted figure capable of overcoming nihilism, was predicted. However, Nietzsche's writings on ubermensch were slim at best, with only 40 entries for the word appearing throughout his work: 10 in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 1 in *The Antichrist,* and a further 25 scattered throughout unpublished note and journals (Cybulska, 2015: p.2).

A general understanding sees ubermensch as a type of post-human figure capable of creating meaning and value, that separates itself from the human by going above and beyond. [1] However, beyond the brief passage below, Nietzsche never really expands upon the concept. We have no solid idea what ubermensch might be. [2] The concept has been variably explored and ignored as it has fallen in and out of favour over the years, and as we

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[1] In Issue 93 of *Philosophy Now,* E. Cybulska notes "RJ Hollingdale (in *Nietzsche*) saw in *Übermensch* a man who had organised the chaos within; Kaufmann (*Nietzsche*) a symbol of a man that created his own values, and Carl Jung (*Zarathustra's Seminars*) a new 'God'. For Heidegger it represented humanity that surpassed itself, whilst for the Nazis it became an emblem of the master race."

[2] In *Beyond Good & Evil,* Nietzsche refers to Alcibiades, Julius Caesar, Hohenstaufen Friedrich II, and da Vinci as "marvellous in-comprehensible and unfathomable men destined for victory and the seduction of others," a clear sign that he believes there are men capable of greatness (Nietzsche, 1973: p.122). However, whilst he expresses admiration for these types of victorious human, they remain entirely that – human. For this reason we accept them as sources of inspiration, but not as examples of figures being close to attaining ubermensch.

will see, some current interpretations weigh heavily on developments of technology. In order for us to develop our own contemporary understanding of what ubermensch could be, we must turn to Nietzsche's initial writing on the subject.

We are first introduced to the idea of the ubermensch early in Nietzsche's 1883 novel, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* where the eponymous character addresses a town crowd upon his arrival:

> "I *teach you the Superman.* Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?
>
> All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man?
>
> What is the ape to men? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the Superman: a laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment."

> (Nietzsche, 2003: pp. 41-42)

Viewing the ubermensch contextually we may see it as Nietzsche's most important response to nihilism, so much so that it is "the meaning of the earth" (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 42). In using the word 'meaning', Nietzsche is bravely suggesting an ultimate answer. This is a concept we must treat with some scrutiny.

For Nietzsche, to overcome nihilism we must move forwards and create ourselves again. In drawing comparisons to apes and animals, Nietzsche casts an unfavourable view of humanity as something inferior. In fact, creatures are capable of creation, but that is not to say that in creating, creatures have moved beyond their own shortcomings. It is a backhanded remark aimed at knocking modern man from his pedestal. Even as an atheist Nietzsche is not holding mankind as an answer, but as a problem to be overcome.

As such the ubermensch would be the ultimate existent form – one that surpasses everything to crown itself. It would quite literally be the most unnatural of things, yet for Nietzsche it would still be of the earth. The onlookers are begged to "*remain true to the earth*" (Nietzsche, 2003: p.42), suggesting that even if the ubermensch is ultimately wildly unnatural, nature is of importance because it is our operational sphere. This is not a nod towards a science of the earth, but rather an understanding that we are confined to the space that we occupy, thus transcendence is not possible in as much as we do not move beyond our worldly parameters, merely our human ones. [3] By escaping both Christianity and what Nietzsche viewed as the near-dogmatic and fideistic basis for science, the ubermensch would thrust forwards as something entirely new, with even the nihilist's approach to the facts of science nullified under their own weight.

We are now more than two-thirds of the way through Nietzsche's proposed two-hundred years of nihilism, and the question of resolution still persists, with no real agreement to

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[3] In fact, Nietzsche dismisses the rise of scientific understanding based upon interpretations of the world as an organism, an idea which he wishes to hastily move away from due to its closeness to that of a spiritual understanding of things (Nietzsche in Safranski, 2003: p. 226).

what ubermensch might be. [4] In recent years, developments in science and technology have made the fantasies of yesteryear a reality. Transhumanism is currently hotly debated across many spheres, including Nietzsche scholarship. [5] However, it has been rightly dismissed as a viable interpretation of ubermensch. Whilst thinkers such as Loeb argue for the development of a transhuman ubermensch, the control of capitalism and its drive towards a theological salvation narrative are problematic. However, by interrogating the truly *trans*human in the development of superintelligent AI, we find the potential for ubermensch to be achieved and exist external to the all-pervading and dominant eye of capitalism. It is here that we align our focus. Understanding the potential of superintelligent AI as ubermensch is an area yet to be explored, and given the popularity and reality of both the transhuman debate, and the reignition of focus on the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, framing AI as potential ubermensch provides new grounds for philosophers, technologists and members of the academic and transhuman communities to engage with old problems in a new light.

### 0.2: Key Notes and Reasons to Study

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[4] As Bogerts points out, the concept of ubermensch have been tightly linked to folk culture, particularly in superhero comic books. Whilst Superman himself might on surface level appear as a reading of ubermensch, the reality is quite different. However, many of the comic book writers of the postmodern era have worked more traditional Nietzschean elements into their stories (with Grant Morrison going so far as to include Nietzsche himself in an issue of *All-Star Superman* (Bogarts, 2013: p.48-53). It is perhaps of no coincidence that culture feeds into understandings of ubermensch, whether they be superheroic interpretations (which in turn feedback to historical myth), future fixation based on augmentation), or something other, the fact remains that in the overcoming of man there is an element of holding humanity as the triumphant part of this. Rather than looking at the *over*man, modern interpretation opts instead for the weaker and misinterpreted *super*man.
[5] Refer to chapter 4 for a list of key texts.

Key to this thesis are the following focal points, which we consider problematic yet vital areas that need addressing. Each of these act as a reason for study, as in our view their nature fails to cut the degree of critical analyses required for the urgency of the task. They are as follows:

1. **Nietzche's writing is historically fixed**. As the world has changed, so too have our understandings of nihilism. Nihilism realised as capitalism has enveloped the world as another repetition of Nietzsche's idea of passive nihilism that cannot be overcome. It is so entwined with being *itself,* and has been intensified to such a degree, that Nietzsche could not have possibly accounted for it. With the limitations in Nietzsche's own writing on ubermensch and the degrees of obfuscation, masking and convulsion associated with his stylistic choices, any definitive reading of Nietzsche is impossible. Rather than fixate on locating ubermensch within an overtly Nietzschean (and historical) framework, we propose the need for a fresh reading of ubermensch with clear applications to the *now.* Nietzsche could never have imagined the world as it is now, so to focus on Nietzsche's concepts of ubermensch and nihilism solely within their historical context devalues the end goal of overcoming as a time-specific process. If we are to overcome nihilism at the end of Nietzsche's proposed 200 years, then we should utilise time and technological progress as tools to reinterpret these historical ideas.

2. **Nietzschean history is clouded with appropriation from the beginning**. In his own lifetime, Nietzsche's work was largely ignored. Nietzsche's own sister, Elisabeth Forster-Nietzsche became his caretaker when his health declined, and upon his death rewrote and edited a number of his unpublished works to align with

her largely National Socialist and anti-Semite agenda. [6] As such, when Nietzsche first rose to fame it was under the guise of national socialism and tied closely to Aryan master race interpretations of ubermensch. As perspectives on Nietzsche have changed, so to have interpretations of his work and the light in which some ideas are viewed. The resurgent interest in ubermensch stemming from developments in transhumanism has itself become problematic, as it falls into the trap of repetitions of passive nihilism and salvation narratives. We believe therefore that if we are to appropriate Nietzsche (and indeed, there may be no other way to look at his work than as a type of toolset for individual interpretation), we must do so with a view to reading Nietzsche in a way befitting the advances outlined in point 1. Simply put, that in developing our fresh reading of Nietzsche in light of historical and technological progress, we must both embrace and take ownership of our own interpretations whilst also ensuring that Nietzsche himself is not placed on a pedestal. We cannot confirm what Nietzsche believed, nor whether those beliefs would hold true if here were to live today. We must therefore ensure that all opinions of Nietzsche's work are treated with scrutiny and that the focus is on the end goal and not preserving the words of Nietzsche himself.

3. **The need to understand ubermensch in different terms**. We can no longer rely on views of ubermensch as Aryan figures, nor the transhuman, so to find a potential

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[6] For more on Elisabeth Forster-Nietzsche, see C. Diethe's *Nietzsche's Sister and the Will to Power,* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003; Macintyre, Ben, *Forgotten Fatherland: The Search for Elisabeth Nietzsche*, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992. For an early yet solid introduction to reading Nietzsche, see Kaufmann's rehabilitation of Nietszche in the post-war environment in *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950).

outcome within Nietzsche's proposed 200 years of nihilism, we must think laterally and outside the box – *trans-Nietzschean*. The abstract nature of the problem (i.e. in capitalism, nihilism pervades all) requires its own system of redefining being and subject in the *trans*. This means that to configure ubermensch within the 200-year time frame, we must look both truly *trans*-Nietzsche and *trans*-human towards a being capable of operating *beyond* these structures. We offer one suggestion, that of superintelligent Artificial Intelligence as ubermensch, as a plausible resolution. We take issue with the perceived inescapability of capitalism and nihilism and the problems encountered in repetition of salvation narratives as attempts to realise ubermensch as transhuman. Our predicament rests on the many endeavours that look to changing the human without thinking of the possibility of the trans/beyond. The emphasis is often placed on the alteration of the human, not that which exists beyond the human. *Instead, we embrace the otherness or alien nature of a possible ubermensch.* There are possibilities for the *transh*uman exist beyond the human but built partly in its image; a self-creating consciousness that retains Nietzsche's link to the human by continually returning to the mechanisms of the will to power, knowledge, technology; willing as a fundamental drive for all life, reason as a marker, but *not* as a definition (life and the universe exist beyond reason, but the ability *to* reason denotes an aspect of the human). To think to the future and *trans*-Nietzsche means that ubermensch could (and should) be an ugly and difficult concept for us to grasp.

*0.3: Research Questions*

Further to the above, we note three key research questions that will be returned to throughout this project. It is our aim to satisfactorily explore each and resolve them by our conclusion. They are as follows:

1. **Are there repetitions of salvation narratives in contemporary non-religious and atheistic society? If so, where are they located and how can they be resolved?**

2. **How has nihilism changed over time, and how has this change impacted on concepts of value and being?**

3. **How can we think both *trans*human and *trans-Nietzsche*? How can we envision ubermensch without glorification of salvation narratives or the human?**

*0.4: Conditions and Limitations*

In order to keep this thesis focussed, we will be proceeding with a few conditions and chosen limitations.

We will be framing Nietzsche historically to better contextualise his thought, doing so through his own work and biographical studies, which allow us to understand Nietzsche within then-contemporary surroundings. Given the importance of time to our theories (and indeed the basis – Nietzsche's predicted 200 years of nihilism), we consider this a vital endeavour. Where possible we will also focus on recent interpretation of Nietzschean

thought, or concepts we find compatible that we can read alongside Nietzsche. [7] Whilst there will be references to ground-breaking thinkers such as Heidegger, due to space limitations we will not explore their thinking in full, instead relying on interlocuters who utilise Heidegger's thinking in ways more directly fitting with the problem at hand. We will however place some emphasis on the thought of Deleuze, whose theories and readings of Nietzsche will be employed throughout. We will also be taking something of an inter-disciplinary approach, employing the work of social theorists, philosophers of science and technology, and political thinkers. This better allows us to frame some of the issues we encounter and contextualise them to read as philosophy of religion. Finally, in keeping with the Nietzschean tradition, we will be using the term *ubermensch* in reference to our own work and Nietzsche's. However, any quotes and references from secondary sources and interlocutors will retain use of their personal preferred translation.

### 0.5: Chapter Breakdown

Our argument is structured in four phases, outlined as Nietzsche's nihilism and the village atheist; the semiotic and hermeneutic shift of nihilism in postmodernity; capitalism as nihilism; technology, ubermensch and the future.

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[7] We focus largely on thinkers who draw inspiration from Nietzsche, whose work best fits the specific of our narrow task. Many of our key interlocutors, including Deleuze, Vattimo, Baudrillard, Woodward, Kroker, Fisher, Berardi and Ansell-Pearson all work in a post-Nietzschean tradition, building upon ideas taken directly from, or sympathetic to, Nietzschean thinking. If we are to aim to think *trans*-Nietzsche, then we do so by building on exceptional thinking undertaken in light of Nietzsche's own. The thinkers included have been picked specifically for this reason, and there is little distinction drawn between discipline or interdisciplinary approaches. Rather, the context here is the Nietzschean *itself*. Unfortunately, this also means that in order to draw a tight focus, some key thinkers such as Heidegger and Lyotard have been largely omitted. They will be referenced where appropriate, but we are unable to engage with them heavily due to word limitations.

In chapter One we situate Nietzsche's historically and use this as a framing device for understanding both Nietzsche's nihilism and Nietzsche himself. We first focus on the idea of the village atheist, the character who rejects god but clings to the values of old, which in turn leads to a kind of atheological transcendence narrative; a kind of passive existence that acts only to repeat the very problem Nietzsche identifies by reskinning the issue at hand under the guise of new developments. We next turn to Nietzsche's reaction to his contemporaries and the idea of the village atheist by exploring his understanding of decadence and taking pleasure in the death of God, where we identify the problem of Nietzsche's use of masks and veiling that act to safeguard his theorising from those deemed unworthy of understanding. We use this to note both how it is problematic for Nietzsche scholars due to the sheer amount of interpretation and disagreement it creates, and also how it creates a statement of urgency: Nietzsche is not to be understood as the answer to nihilism, nor an end-goal, rather he is a way point in the process. Finally, we unravel Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism as the nullification of all values in light of the death of God, and note that in order to progress towards ubermensch we must employ a form of active nihilism that avoids the repetitions of the village atheist, whose own we define as passive nihilism.

Chapter Two re-imagines nihilism in postmodernity by exploring new developments in philosophical thought and the ways in which science and technology impact on the world at present. We focus on the shift from the interiority of Nietzsche's nihilism to the exteriority of postmodern nihilism, with its focus on the sociopolitical ramifications of the problematic. We then turn to Baudrillard's understanding of semiotics and the dissolution of meaning through the intensification of repetitions without original intent, those of the

simulation and simulacra, which we filter through the predominant framework of capitalism. We understand this as the crux of the post-death of God return to the theological. We then turn to Vattimo's idea of a nihilism that cannot be overcome, outlining his theories of existence within metaphysics, and how nihilism grants us a playground for hermeneutics beyond history and the delineation of metanarratives. We note that on surface level, many postmodern thinkers embrace the problem of nihilism but provided no answers to its overcoming, instead opting to treat it as a boundary to work within. In order to continue on a path of active nihilism, we employ the work of Woodward to speculate the grounds for overcoming nihilism in light of postmodern developments, as envisioned in the acts of difference and repetition. By finding room for difference in repetition we can see the potential for an active nihilism that breaks the cycle we encounter time and again in the thinking of the village atheist.

Chapter Three focuses on the problem of capitalism as a repetition of theology, understanding it in light of the postmodern condition and Nietzsche's figure of The Last Man, a character content with symbols and the fruits afforded us by capitalism. We use Goodchild, Berardi and Fisher to understand capitalism as a form of passive nihilism, with an all-pervading nature that seeps into every facet of contemporary life. Next we explore the impact of capitalism on the human condition as encountered through guilt and anxiety. By understanding capitalism as a semiotic compound, we see not only the flourishing of the village atheist, but also the rise of his successor, the last man. We next turn understanding the trappings of capitalism as the inescapable, utilising Fisher's theory of capitalist realism - an inability for us to think of any possible alternative or life exterior to capitalism, which acts to further erode the thoughts and hopes of the village nihilist by re-

internalising the problem of nihilism. We conclude by understanding the need to find new developments for ubermensch that factor in technology and lateral thinking to exceed the boundaries of capital.

In Chapter Four we explore concepts of ubermensch as transhuman technological beings under capitalism, interrogating recent thought on the transhuman as ubermensch. Using the work of Ansell-Pearson, we understand the need to reject transhumanism as ubermensch on grounds of village atheism and greater repetitions of transcendence narratives, as identified in the theological and its link to the inescapable nature of semiocapitalism. We return to Nietzsche and interrogate his concepts of the will to power as a primary drive, and the concept of eternal return. This allows us to legitimise ideas of difference in repetition, and reading these alongside Ansell-Pearson's understanding of the viral aspects of being and the legitimacy of assemblages, we acknowledge the potential beyond the transhuman. We next employ Kroker and his work on the will to technology *as* the will to power, invigorating arguments for the will to power and the potential for new structures *trans*human to replace the concept of the transhuman figure as ubermensch. Finally, we filter this through Nick Bostrom's work on superintelligent Artificial Intelligence, which we identify as having the potential to be ubermensch. Employing Kroker's will to technology alongside Bostrom's theorising on AI, we show that a superintelligent being would have capacity to think beyond the passive nihilism of the village atheist and capitalism by finding grounds of rejection based on its own ability to self-replicate and think beyond the parameters encountered in human thought. By employing a form of repetition itself (in constantly repeating processes to self-improve), AI superintelligence becomes capable of creating true and inherent value.

# CHAPTER 1: THE DAWN OF NIHILISM AND THE VILLAGE ATHEIST AS PASSIVE NIHILIST

In order for us to speculate what ubermensch might be we must first ground ourselves historically. Nietzsche presented some oft-overlooked ideas that are integral to this thesis, so we shall address them suitably here. We will first look to Nietzsche and then-contemporary society, identifying atheists of the day and Nietzsche's belief that they practiced a form of weak atheism. In turn this led them to ascribe to a kind of religious morality to life. During his lifetime, Nietzsche's ideas were largely dismissed, perhaps ironically, by a general public who had inadvertently sided with Nietzsche but weren't willing to consider the significance of their own rejection of God. We identify these individuals as 'village atheists', beings of transmodernity who rejects figures of theological transcendence theoretically, but instead turns towards an atheological transcendence narrative. In keeping with our grounding theme, we look to the concept of decadence, Nietzsche's expression of urgency in the spirit of the day, that hammers the proclamation of his mistimed arrival amongst the apathetic village atheists. We will see how this fuels Nietzsche's writing and his approach of veiling and masking his intent, which in turn leads to confusion within scholarship but also acts as a statement of urgency – Nietzsche is to be considered a waypoint and not an end goal. Finally, we address the specifics of Nietzsche's nihilism and the need for employing a kind of *active* nihilism to overcome it. In the passive we see repetitions of the same failed systems we identified within the village atheists and the concept of the idolised Nietzsche as an end point. The active, however, gives us grounds to move forward with this thesis and push towards a logical end point.

*1.1: The Importance of the Village Atheist and the Death of God as Signifiers of the Nihilism Problem*

"Finally he threw his lantern on the ground so that it broke into pieces and went out. 'I come too early', he then said; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men'."

(Nietzsche, 2010: p.120)

In starting we should note from the above indented quote that Nietzsche makes the bold prediction that he has 'come too early'. This is not the only time Nietzsche references this. In the preface to *WTP,* Nietzsche claims that nihilism will be "the history of the next two centuries" (Nietzsche, 2006: xvii). This would place us more than half way through the supposed event of nihilism, and as we move ever-closer to an end date it raises questions about both his claims and their possible outcomes. He knew that the problem of nihilism would not be resolved during his own lifetime, yet over one hundred years later the issue is still largely confined to the back halls of academia and speculative thought.

Given the nature of Nietzsche's previous writing, it is of little surprise that his declaration of the death of God was theoretically designed to provoke the masses. However, there is also suggestion within the text that he was already well-aware of the response it would warrant; laughter and mockery, then dismissal. The herd, as presented by Nietzsche, remain largely apathetic and indifferent to his cause. By using this brash concept as a

catalyst for the advent of nihilism, Nietzsche set out to situate humanity in the nihil, with the death of God as a starting point.

When the madman searches for God in section 125 of *TGS* he announces: "Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter." (Nietzsche, 2001: p.119). Read as an event contemporary to Nietzsche, we can see that within European society the idea of atheism was already in bloom, at least enough for non-belief to be accepted within some pockets of society.

In his biography of Nietzsche, Safranski (2002, p.307) notes that atheism as no new matter, rather the idea of God had been cast aside by the intellectual and academic thinkers that Nietzsche was writing for, instead replaced by the popularity boom of the natural and social sciences. However, despite atheism being alive and well, Nietzsche makes note that others are not taking the death of God seriously. In *TSZ* when the madman engages with the villagers his declarations are met with mockery -

> Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then he caused great laughter. Has he been lost, then? Asked one. Did he lose is way like a child?... Thus they shouted and laughed one interrupting the other.

(Nietzsche, 2003: p.119)

We see that the townsfolks' approach is to mock but not to engage with the madman, and conceptually this may be within good reason. As Randal Rauser notes on his blog, in the

19th century the term 'village atheist' was popularised, referring to "an atheistic individual within a religious community who vocally (and provocatively) expresses his/her dissent from the religious consensus of the community". [8] It's a term not uncommon now, still in use and with stronger if comical implications: the village atheist is a serial complainer who thrives on the hinge of the challenge, often part of the new atheist movement, who sways dangerously close to a form of rampant near-religious fervour in his belief. [9] As Leigh Eric Schmidt notes, the term gained traction quickly, achieving an almost mythic status some forty to fifty years later, particularly amongst white Americans. (Schmidt, 2016: xiii).

Robert Pippin notes that whilst the village atheist may dismiss the existence of God, they still cling to the *values* of old (2006: p.51).[10] Whilst they may champion science and reason, it is simply not enough; the basis for value still falls to those concepts inherited from Christian thinking. Clearly, our vocal modern counterpart is historically closer to Nietzsche's own understanding than we may have realised. Pippin questions why this concept is so important for Nietzsche, but in the guise of the madman Nietzsche provides

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8 For further reading on Rauser's interpretation of village atheism, both historically and now, see his 2016 dialogue with Sincere Kirabo, *Leveling up From Village Atheism – A Dialogue with Randal Rauser*.

[9] Julian Baggini's 2012 article for the Financial Times titled *The Village Atheist: Stories* explore the experiences of modern atheists in bible-belt America, many of whom mention a state of alienation, ostracisation and mistrust on the part of others, with one anecdote telling of how a clean-living atheist was not allowed to babysit for fear of teaching evolution, but one with a heavy drug dependency would be considered because of her belief in God. David Silverman, president of the American Atheists believes in challenging the concept that it is impossible to be good without God. Whilst historically we have seen mention of atheism we might consider that within the context of society some deemed village atheists might in fact be unwilling to think beyond a mere dismissal or speak out on the basis of potential ostracisation from communities. However, as we shall see, this in itself is problematic for Nietzsche and could most probably be considered a form of *passive* nihilism. Shortly before the release of his own book, *The Village Atheist*, Eric Schmidt notes that historically, most statistics show that atheism is a very white and male group. It is of little surprise that Nietzsche's own opinion would likely most appeal to those like him.

10 According to Safranski, the workers' movement had helped make the natural and social sciences, even for the working class and "wretched of the earth", yet despite the ape replacing God on the pedestal of questioning, it appears that to Nietzsche this was not enough (Safranski, 2002: pp.307-308). As we shall see in the Chapter 4, the concept of evolution does not, For Nietzsche, account for humanity's being as a social or reasoned being. This factors directly into his view of nihilism and what Pippin has dubbed 'the village atheist', because it is still an approach based on values of old.

us a comedy of sorts. The enlightened character, perceived as mad by the crowd of village atheists, is perhaps also quite mad because his rejection of values, the very same ones that the village atheists still cling to, leave him with no basis for his thinking. He is quite literally mad because all structure and morality of thought have dissipated.

So just what does this death of God mean and how is it shaped by the masses? His claim, *"we have killed him* – you and I!"* (Nietzsche, 2009: pp.119-120), places emphasis not only on the act of killing, but also on the culprits being Europeans themselves. For Nietzsche, the death of God isn't simply an undoing of belief that signifies a shift in thought, rather it is a nail in the coffin of religious thought because it presents something definitive. The progress made by humans is tantamount to killing God because there is no way for God to recover. Where mystery once seeped, logic, reason and science have now filled the gaps and flushed away any semblance of the ultimate other. However, the village atheists' unwillingness to accept that they have killed god suggests that even though they may dismiss the concept, they are not yet ready to consider the deeper implications.

For Gianni Vattimo, the death of God is the recognition of God as no longer necessary. He deems this as a literal understanding, developed by thinkers such as Heidegger, but goes beyond this to suggest the following:

> the death of God about which Nietzsche speaks is the death of Christ on the cross. Why? Because it is exactly after Christianity, or the event of Christianity, that it becomes possible to no longer believe in the classical, rational gods of the Greeks.

Clearly Vattimo's death of God holds value as an event, something which signifies a change or overhaul. What we see in Vattimo's thought is the nullifying effect that Christianity has had on previous structures of religion. It is encountered in many forms, both historically and politically, in the shape of the spreading of Christianity (by force or otherwise), but also as a repetition of a cyclical event. The structure of Christianity has replaced that which went before, but still in the form of a parametered and ordered system.

For John D. Caputo, the Nietzschean concept of the death of God is about "... the death of the God of power, which belongs to the infinite task of the critique of idols." (Caputo, 2007: p.68). As such the aspect of value is less about the specificity of God, but rather the structures of power as perceived as *value*. [11] However, we will see over the course of this work that even for atheists the power structures of theologies still hold sway, and in our current times there is still a type of religious value ascribed to the world, enacted under the gaze of Nietzsche's village atheist; systematic belief tied to concepts of atheological transcendence or achieving an ultimate. Rather than diminish over time, the role of the village atheist has grown via the understanding of power as an ultimate. If we are to conceive of ubermensch then we need to be cautious of these repetitions of faith as found in the thinking of the village atheist.

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11 Caputo's validation of this claim ties in with the development of his distinctive approach to deconstruction and religion, which he has termed "weak theology". In *The Weakness of God* (2006), disputes the idea of God as omnipotent, and in turn highlights the weakness of both theology and the church; "The logos of the cross is a call to renounce violence, not to conceal and defer it and then, in a stunning act that takes the enemy by surprise, to lay them low with real power, which shows the enemy who really has the power. That is just what Nietzsche was criticizing under the name of ressentiment" (Caputo, 2006: p.44).

The French thinker, Gilles Deleuze, whose unique readings of Nietzsche were integral to both Nietzschean scholarship and later developments in Continental and postmodern thinking, understood that the declaration of the death of God "makes the existence of God dependent on a synthesis, it synthesises the idea of God with time, becoming, history and man." (Deleuze, 2012: p.144). If we read these differing interpretations alongside each other, what emerges is a complex yet intricate set of ideas that signify a perceived system of flatline value. Nietzsche's death of God is our way of recognising this. In declaring this true we see the values of old nullified, ready to theoretically be replaced by a new order of things, new structures of power and value, and the emergence of potential for new events that can break the cycle. [12] As we shall see later, this concept becomes integral to our investigation of nihilism, and Deleuze own ideas of difference and repetition (stemming in part from the Nietzschean concept of Eternal Return) is key to understanding both the potential for combatting nihilism *and* developing ubermensch.

*1.2: Decadence, Masks and Esoteric Thinking as Problematic Aspects of Nietzsche's Work*

Having identified the village atheist and the repetitions involved in subversive faith-sets, Nietzsche needed to find ways of making his voice heard. By presenting his work in text form, he could provide the observant reader with layers of meaning beyond the simple

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[12] For recent further reading on Death of God Theology see Eagleton's *Culture and the Death of God* (2015); McCullough & Shroeder (eds.) *Thinking Through the Death of God: A Critical Companion to Thomas J.J. Altizer* (2003)*;* Young (2003) *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life.*

pleasures of the narrative in *TSZ*. Beyond this, he highlighted the outlined contemporary problems within his texts. Safranski notes that in *Case of Wagner*, a polemic against the composer (a figure Nietzsche once held dearly), that Nietzsche's focus is one of *decadence*, which is summed up as "the attempt to draw subtle pleasures from the phantom pain of a vanished god" (Safranski, 2002: p.309). [13] Indeed, it was a mindset that Nietzsche himself claimed to have partially fallen victim to as a "child of those times" (Nietzsche, 2000: 6:11), and one that many held. This is perhaps evident in the village atheist, a pleasure not of itself but taken from the pleasure *of* pleasure. Enjoyment not of the 'in itself', but of the observational outsider. We must question here whether decadence may be key to understanding Nietzsche's outlook on the masses, or at least those who were wise and brave enough to reject God. It is possible to draw an image of an arrogant Nietzsche from this; pleasure that ultimately remains false and inauthentic because of its removal from the direct, and in being so becomes a type of *schadenfreude* for Nietzsche. Nietzsche, as a *farther* removed observer taking pleasure (or at least some semblance) may be seen to revel in the failings of the village atheist to draw on true value and experience, laughing at their misfortune. As counterpoint, (and much like his madman), we might interpret him as despairing at the world that surrounds him because he is powerless to make change, unless those with the true skill to unlock the potentials of nihilism find his work. [14]

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[13] Upon the two men falling out, Wagner wrote to Nietzsche's doctor suggesting Nietzsche's ill-health was a manifestation of symptoms resulting from excessive masturbation. Given Nietzsche's infatuation with Cosima, Wagner's wife, Wagner's approach appears based solely on humiliating Nietzsche, which in turn led to Nietzsche's rebuttal. For more information, see *Richard Wagner: His Life, His Work, His Century* (Gregor-Dellin, 1983).

[14] Ure's *'Nietzsche's Schadenfreude'* (2013) sees Nietzsche finding joy in the misfortune and suffering of others through Darwinian evolution, as perceived from the eye of the scientist – a type of farther-removed observer.

*1.2.a: Understanding Nietzschean Decadence as a Tool for Future Thinkers*

Classical interpretations of Nietzsche's decadence, such as those by De Huszar, imply any

form of faith, philosophy and art that spring from weakness, which Nietzsche "combats

[them] not as one would refute an error, but as one would fight against disease" (De

Huszar, 1945: p.259). The theologian Paul Tillich notes "Even his sense of being "out of

season" (*unzeitgemass*) is primarily a way of expressing his negation of *his own* time"

(Tillich, 1945: p.307). [15] It appears that this decadence has an effect on Nietzsche that acts

as a form of *zeitgeist.* When viewed in the context of the village atheist, declaring the death

of God gives rise to an urgency that had not come before. If we further contextualise with

De Huszar's disease analogy, this urgency is multiplied considerably and we see that for

Nietzsche, in the context of history and his outlook on the world, that he had in fact come

too early. [16]

It is important however to note that Nietzsche's thinking is not to be viewed as cultural or

social arrogance, that he does not make these declarations to position himself any better

than those that surround him. In the foreword of *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche declares –

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[15] The idea of decadence itself was popularised by writers such as Nisard, Baudelaire and Gautier, whose literary was in vogue in many parts of Europe, particularly amongst the educated higher classes of society. For a history of the idea and selected readings, see Desmarais, J. & Baldick, C., *Decadence An Annotated Anthology* (2012).

16 It is worth noting that Nietzsche's own use of the term decadence has historical grounding. Boulby (1976: pp.221-228) makes note of Nietzsche's turn from the common perception of the decadence of the late Roman Empire, one of excess and corruption. In fact Nietzsche stands opposed, instead viewing Rome as a splendidly organised model. Silk (2004) notes that in later works such as *Twilight of Idols, The Antichrist and CoG,* Nietzsche's use of characters such as Dionysus and Apollo appear less frequently in his work, in fact for Boulby this may be a response to Nietzsche's shift towards a more Romancentric outlook on history. However, as Silk goes on to suggest, "Nietzsche's identification of decadence as a representative and essential condition of humanity, and not merely some marginal historical phenomenon, is profound and profoundly original; it is also, indeed, an identification that only someone at the knowing heart of decadence could make." (2004: p.587-602). We will be utilising this opinion to situate Nietzsche's decadence as a contemporary event and note that in being so it *does* differ from the decadence of history.

The last thing *I* would promise would be to 'improve' humanity. I do not set up any

new idols; let the old ones learn what it means to have legs of clay. *Toppling idols*

(my word for 'ideals') – that is more my kind of handiwork.

(Nietzsche, 2007: p.3)

From this we see Nietzsche's attempt to avoid casting himself as a type of saviour or idol;

rather he wants to equip the reader with the tools to enact their own overcoming. In this

same book, Nietzsche's discussion of decadence is one that he reveals he has been able to

*invert*, a skill which has allowed him to even consider a 'revaluation of all values'

(Nietzsche, 2007: p.8).

### *1.2.b: The problem with Nietzsche's Esotericism and Masks as Subjective Interpretation and the Benefits of Positive Application*

In Kaufmann's Nietzsche, he poses the idea that *TSZ* "contains most of Nietzsche's ideas in

veiled and symbolic form," (Kaufman, 1974: p.65). By way of example, for Kaufmann the

coming of the madman in *TGS* is undoubtedly a prophetic visage of Nietzsche himself

(Ibid, p.97), a mask of sorts. We later find that in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche

expounds that "everything profound loves a mask", and that "there is not only deceit

behind a mask; there is so much goodness in cunning" (Nietzsche, 2003: p.69). As a

further safeguard from Nietzsche as prophetic figure, the use of masks gives rise to a non-

identifiable Nietzsche. By presenting his ideas through multiple characters and from

multiple angles, he is able to subvert the singular idea of 'Nietzsche the idol'.

22

If we are to understand Nietzsche as a subversive figure, then we may understand the value of posing ideas in the form of masks and characters. As Cybulska (2015: p.5) points out, as a classical philologist, Nietzsche was well versed in Greek tragedy and he reflects on this throughout his work, particularly in his embrace of the God of wine, theatre, ritual madness and ecstasy, Dionysus. It was commonplace within the Greek performances he loved so much for the actors to wear masks, both to invoke a sense of dread, and to enable them to play multiple roles. With Nietzsche acting essentially as a one-man performer in his texts, the use of multiple perspectives and characters could be employed without the loss of the concepts central to his thinking. [17]

With *TSZ*, Nietzsche presented a work that had both narrative structure and a deeper intention in the philosophical ideas it presented. Each of the characters within the text act as vehicles for concepts, many of which represented differing aspects of Nietzsche's own thoughts. Even a casual glance at the character of Zarathustra suggests an eerie familiarity that goes beyond the protagonistic tropes and historical references. Those acquainted with Nietzsche's work will see a figure portrayed in a similar light to the fleeting appearance of the madman in *TSZ*. Is Zarathustra a knowing referential nod to those of us familiar with his earlier work, or perhaps a development of that character? Could he even be something more; a device employed with great intent and specificity, or none of the above?

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[17] Porter (2000: pp.1-2) notes that whilst *TBoT* initially appears as an exercise in philology with a focus on Greek tragedy, for classical philologists it acts as 'anathema: it represents a departure from narrow philological ways and an opening toward a speculative and threatening philosophy." For Porter this is an indication that even in his earliest writings, Nietzsche's ideas are far stronger than we might give them credit for. For further reading, see *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on the Birth of Tragedy.*

There are striking similarities:

> 1.       Both figures are outsiders of sorts. The madman, in being referred to as such, and in being mocked by the crowd, is a figure outcast by society. Zarathustra, emerging from a mountain top at the beginning of *TSZ* after an exile of many years, is similar. Addressed as 'The wanderer' (Nietzsche: 2003, p.40) by an old man who recognises him, clearly Zarathustra is known figure, and one of some speculation. We could question whether the same is true of the madman, a man who goes not by his own name but by a name applied to him by others.
>
> 2.       Both share their wisdom with common town folk.
>
> 3.       Both men are openly mocked by the crowds.
>
> 4.       Both men proclaim the death of God.

Frey-Rohn (1989: p.81) suggests that "The 'Zarathustra' figure became the mouthpiece of thoughts Nietzsche had long held within his unconscious, but had as yet been cautious about articulating." If this is true, then the madman of *TGS* could well be our taster, with Nietzsche testing the water by way of aphorism. It may also account for the sheer variety of characters and masks we encounter within *TSZ*. Finally stepping out to speak his true mind, the use of other characters might even suggest an overwhelming explosion of excitement – Nietzsche has arrived and he wants to make sure every reader knows it.

In the opening parts of *TSZ,* Zarathustra says that his aim is "To lure many away from the herd – that is why I have come. The people and the herd shall be angry with me: the

herdsmen shall call Zarathustra a robber." (Nietzsche, 2003: p.51). Are the masks of the madman and Zarathustra simply masks worn by Nietzsche himself in other guises? If we are to see this as a part-reflection of Nietzsche, the man who has declared God dead and called the village atheists into question, then we know his work is not for the masses, rather those strong enough to utilise Nietzsche's thinking for their own means. Despite his use of 'many', he does not specify *all*. In fact, this concept will be of importance to us when we explore esotericism within Nietzsche's work.

Amusingly, Michels notes that in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Nietzsche treats everyone (other than Wagner) with equal disdain, and that by later honing his approach the prologue to *TSZ,* he clearly voices his message whilst allowing for a treatment of his subject without misunderstanding – Nietzsche attends to his own philosophy in the knowledge that if done properly, it will find its own audience (Michels, 2007: p.278).

In his recent work, *Anti-Nietzsche* Bull questions the esoteric nature of Nietzsche's writing, and notes that in *The Antichrist,* Nietzsche's dedication of the book to 'the very few' posits the idea that only those of the right mindset can truly understand his intention (2011: p.31). That people of all walks of life, ethnicity, gender and political persuasion have read it as their own presents a problem. With the reader called into question we must ask whether this becomes less about an actualisation of steps towards an ubermensch and more about a process of becoming that is continual, perhaps as a means of breaking the cyclical nature of nihilism as presented in the passive village atheist.

Bull's belief, put simply, is that "postmodernity spawned plenty of post-Nietzscheans anxious to appropriate Nietzsche for their own agendas," (Ibid, p.30). Removing Nietzsche from his historical context, these appropriations become the very concern he speaks of in *EH;* this Nietzsche is not the buffoon, but the saint he is so worried of becoming; The Holy Nietzsche. Bull's aim therefore is not to help readers 'get' Nietzsche, but to "enable us to get over him." (Ibid, p.30).

As readers we have a tendency to trust Nietzsche, and read as if each of us is the reader intelligent enough to understand his esoteric texts, that we 'read for victory' (Ibid, p.33) – we may feel special and part of a small and secretive club for enlightened individuals. Reading for victory was Nietzsche's own preferred method (Ibid, p.35), initially he considered that "reason might eventually catch up," but rejected the idea in his later work. As Bull states, "The reader's yearning for victory is now not a means to knowledge but an example of what knowledge is" (Ibid, p.35).

Bull cites Conway early in the text and proposes the idea that in Nietzche's later work, he takes an even more esoteric approach (in the introduction to the Anti-Christ he invites the reader to be part of the esotericism), and that this may be an attempt to reach a wider readership, having found that his audience was non-existent. (2011: p.32). More (2011: p.24) notes that in 1885, Nietzsche learned that "more than two-thirds of his books sat unsold in a German warehouse, that [his publisher] had frequently failed to even supply to bookstores… and that little more than five hundred copies of his works had sold over a twelve year period." It may come as no surprise that Nietzsche's approach shifted towards attempting to draw a crowd, going so far as to secure a new publisher, and write new

introductions to his existing works (More, 2011: pp.24-25). Clearly, for Bull, the issue at

hand is not so much a question of Nietzsche's philosophy, but rather his approach. His

attempts to grow an audience may even undermine his own work.

For Fisher (1995: p.517), the role of masks and esotericism is problematic. His concern is

that these masks cause too literal an issue for the reader, in that their immersive nature is so

convincing that the truth of the 'real' may never be uncovered. As he points out, "He is

charged with speaking duplicitously, as through a mask; an invented, fictionalized voice

rather than his own person" (Ibid, p.517). At this point we encounter further problems

regarding the nature of Nietzsche's use of masks and their relation to truth. Clark and

Dudrick (2014: p.353), whose analysis of *BGaE* develops concepts of an 'esoteric'

Nietzsche, believe that he *sometimes* writes in a way that is deliberately misleading, hence

he does not mean what he initially appears to. [18] Their claim is that the "esoteric sees them

[things] from above," (Ibid, p.354); that Nietzsche literally writes in the knowledge that

some will misinterpret his claims, and that the concept of masks support this.

It is an interesting and thought provoking claim. Whilst the view of the esoteric (and 'from

above') may suggest an arrogance, Clark and Dudrick interpret this as to "reflect a

viewpoint that looks down on an earlier understanding that the interpreter has now

overcome" (Ibid, p.354). [19] Rather than the arrogant casting-off of an intellectual

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[18] Clark an Dudrick's argument is developed in *The Soul of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil* (2012). Focussing on the aforementioned book, it develops arguments of subtlety and interconnectivity within the text, providing cohesion between arguments that may otherwise appear estranged. This leads to them proclaiming *BGaE* as Nietzsche's most important work. As the focus of this thesis is not on *BG&E*, I felt it more important to utilise the above paper that outlines their arguments more succinctly, and with the sole interest of exploring the concepts of esotericism and masks.
[19] A presentation by Leiter on the Esoteric readings of Nietzsche (Oxford, May 17-18, 2014), commended Clark and Dudrick on their work, but proposed that their arguments hinged on esotericism as cover for the misreading of texts, that their focus on reading between the lines and "what was left unsaid" was a pseudo-

underclass, their interpretation suggests an enlightenment found in the esoteric. In being so, it is a step *beyond,* perhaps a step that could be the seed of the development of an ubermensch. On the subject of esoteric wisdom, Fisher (1995: p.521) sees the masked approach as nourishment for the higher man, and poison for the commoner – they may not be to mislead, but it is the price paid for not giving Nietzsche's work full attention.

### *1.2.c: Understanding Dionysus, Greek History and Nietzsche's Philological Background*

Throughout Nietzsche's work a fascination with the god Dionysus emerges. The Greek god of wine, rapture, religious ecstasy and theatre, it is of no surprise as a philologist, Nietzsche would find fascination in this figure. Safranski (2002: pp. 64-65) notes the development of two lectures in 1870 that outlined "the interplay of fundamental polar forces of culture". Nietzsche banded the figures of Dionysus and Apollo together as basic drives that form the classic tragedy. The passions and music belong to Dionysus; the language and dialectics of the stage to Apollo. Apollo for Nietzsche took on an element of form, architecture and ordered individuality and provided a system opposed to the chaos of Dionysus. That chaos was, of course, not to be understood in a negative sense, rather it was the spark within the human that gave way to being. The boundaries are fluid.

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problem. Leiter was in agreement with many exoteric readings, believing they gave ground for sound understanding of Nietzschean thought. I have, however, decided not to explore this in detail both for time constraints and on the ground that such arguments could be seen as stunting progress. Without new and interesting ways of interpreting texts, this thesis itself would not be possible. If Kaufman's work had been rejected for similar reasons, we may still be working on the assumption Nietzsche was a Nazi. Whilst I acknowledge Leiter's point, I also believe the arguments offered by Clark and Dudrick are more than sufficient to justify their claims.

For Deleuze, there is a kind of relationality between the figures of Dionysus and Christ. He sees a correlation between passions; a shared phenomenon but of opposing perspectives, with Christ denying the value of life in itself, where suffering provides the key to overcoming life through God. (Deleuze, 2009: p.14). In Dionysus, however, Deleuze finds a kind of self-justification for life *in* life as a type of externalisation of suffering opposed to the internalisation found in Christ (Ibid, p.15). In removing the binaries associated with human/God dialectic, Deleuze believes that a Dionysian affirmation is an encompassing plurality based upon its diversity, rather than the singular path leading to salvation and affirmation through God. However, not all interpretations carry such hope and weight in the externalization of affirmation found in the Dionysian understanding. In his paper on Dionysus and masks, Fisher (1995: pp. 521-522) notes that many recent readings assume a closure of binary opposition; Apollo-Dionysus, masculine and feminine, subject and object. For Fisher there is a problem.  Chronologically, Nietzsche writes of Zarathustra criticising the 'higher man' as incapable of grasping the truth that he speaks. It is in fact Zarathustra's animals that understand and articulate what he is saying. But Nietzsche goes on to "reaffirm his earlier rejection of the binary of appearance/reality contrast in *BG&E",* quoting "The true world – we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no. *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one"* (Ibid, pp. 521-522). It appears that the binary, whilst offering parameters of function, does not account for activity by way of the polar (we could not survive at boiling temperature, not at freezing point), but rather an existence that *must* sit between the two. Clark and Dudrick's esoteric understanding of Nietzsche explores suggestions that *a priori* (theoretical 'fictions of logic') assumptions falsify reality, which assume that there is a thing in itself to be falsified. As they point out, "… perhaps the claim is that it is silly or nonsensical to assume

that the values that stand behind logic are conducive to truth just because they are necessary for our preservation" (2012, p.359).

Indeed, questioning truth (the very root of nihilism) does not mean that the values we employ are necessarily negative. As Clark and Dudrick suggest, *preservation* is the order of the day, and if truth is an unknown quantity, myth or is unattainable either at present or ever, then masks are vital for survival. As Fisher says (1995: pp.523-524) "…masks simultaneously conceal and reveal; it is never a question of either/or but always of both/and… Persons whose faces are masks conceal the content of their feelings or beliefs at a given moment, but simultaneously reveal their character as private or duplicitous persons." He goes on to explore this concept within the context of the historical textual delivery of Dionysus, making reference to Euripides' *Bacchae,* in which Dionysus takes on a human form. This is presented by the actor in the form of masks, most of which smile. By the end of the play it is the masks that reveal Dionysus as a god, not his godly form. "A mask of Dionysus thus symbolizes the duality of concealment and revelation involved in Nietzsche's denial of being able to "see" anything hidden beneath appearances." (Fisher, 1995: 524).

We might say that the binary presented is only so in as much as the mask, laying somewhere between those two points, provides the degree of value as gradation between the dichotomy in question – the value *itself* is not in the either/or aspect, but the degree of both/and that constitute the whole. The mask, therefore, is not a matter of solely concealing or hiding, but of creating a value within itself, and the role of esotericism would presumably not be an unmasking of truth, but a step beyond the mask that continues to

exist in semiosis. The mask remains an anchor for understanding, but as a waypoint towards clarification on Nietzschean thinking.

When Zarathustra encounters the tightrope walker, he speaks the following:

> Man is a rope, fastened between animal and superman – a rope over the abyss. A dangerous going across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and staying still. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal: what can be loved in man is that his is a *going-across* and a *down-going.''*

(Nietzsche, 2003: pp.43-44)

If the figure of Dionysus is a positive affirmation vs. that of the figure of Christ, then even acting as an object between binaries, the concept of the mask and its outpouring of understanding aligns with the plurality of affirmation found in Deleuze interpretation. The value therefore is not *in* the binary of opposition, but in the waypoints identified within the argument. The tightrope walker is at neither end of the rope but instead acts as the masks along the way and the complex configuration of outpourings that flow from each.

Early in his paper on Dionysus, Fisher (1995: p.517) notes a timeline of sorts in Nietzsche's thinking. Starting with *TBoT*, Nietzsche first employs Dionysus as an interpretive principle. By the time he reaches *BGaE*, he names himself a disciple of Dionysus. This culminates in an identification of himself as Dionysus in his last

communications. [20] We must question the integrity of the statement and of whether the use of Dionysus in Nietzsche's work is integrity or infatuation. The madman and Zarathustra, already identified as outsiders, as men walking against the tide of others, possess elements of this Dionysian image. Whilst we may understand this as intentional, the intention goes beyond the visage. Nietzche's love of Dionysus, so pure in his approach (and culminating in him declaring himself Dionysus), suggests by the end of his life, that Nietzsche himself believed in nothing beyond the masks. This masking of reality was itself the fabric of tangibility that we encounter. Dionysus, as a god of masks, exists as much in the spaces between the masks as those proposed behind them. The outsider, therefore, as a figure of the esoteric, may already possess the tools of overcoming via an awareness that begins with the death of God and the negation of values and meaning.

Returning to Clark and Dudrick (2012: p.364), they state the following:

> "…that it makes sense that the values that stand behind logic might be leading us astray, even though they satisfy *our* cognitive interests, only on the assumption that the measure of things is something trans-human, something that is not simply human cognitive interests and the practices they guide."

If the values behind logic mislead, and values exist *beyond,* then Clark and Dudrick have removed the philosophical importance of the human, based upon both the universe beyond

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[20] Fisher notes that "Nietzsche's words suggest that he is a "disciple" of Dionysus and that Dionysus is a mask for something other than human." (1993: p.524). The fascination with gods by a man who declared them dead begs many questions, but contextually we may question whether this is the traces of dead gods found present in every day artefacts and texts. The building blocks of his own theories are clearly based on his passions, and that begs the question of how his approach would differ if it not for his background and passion for classics and philology.

cognition and the suggestion that the operational sphere of the human is within a closed circuit – mass is only important within the context of human understanding of the universe. Without humans, mass would cease to exist because the concept would be lost.

Clark and Dudrick's understanding of the pursuit of truth, however, provides grounds for questioning. Whilst they (correctly) call in to question the interplay between desire and values, they do so with truth as an end goal and further this with suggestions of "finding ways to avoid being locked into them [desires and values], but by finding ways to avoid being locked in to them, in part by recognising and seriously considering other affective and normative possibilities" (Ibid. p.365). The importance, however, may not be on the truth itself as an end goal. If truth does not arise from a predetermination of thought and we are not seeking to prove a hypothesis (piecing X to Y), then we either arrive at truth as the complete, or we seek completion via the semiotics of truth, existing perhaps as waypoints, none of which grant more validation than the other because each amounts to an equality that amasses the whole of truth.

As they conclude, "philosophers would proceed differently if they adjusted their self-conception to fit how they actually arrive at their values, but not because they would or could keep values from affecting how they see the evidence." (Ibid, p.365). History and subjectivity are therefore as dangerous and misleading as they are vital (we could not find ourselves in a position to ask these questions were it not for either). We may even go so far as to say both are facets of consumption, and much like the food we eat, both are as beneficial as they are detrimental. The question raised by Clark and Dudrick is whether our cognitive functions are themselves sufficient enough to account for adjustments in self-

conception, and whether self-conception can even align with an evidence of values that stands beyond the light of reason.

The issue we contend is that of our exegetic struggle; the above outlines some problematic thoughts. With Nietzsche's attempts to safeguard himself from becoming another idol we also find a rejection of philosophy as a tradition based upon 'creating the world' in man's image. For Nietzsche, reading philosophy near-always pushes us to exalt the philosopher or idea that we build or beliefs on [21] His playful love of masks goes beyond subversion to the point of infuriation, and any aims to clarify his intent were lost with his early demise. However, there is a fuel in his writing and the identification of the village atheist, and the drive and safeguarding found in both decadence and esoteric masking, provides us with the grounds to look *beyond* Nietzsche. Nietzsche concern over idolisation pushes us to think *trans*-Nietzsche. In order to look towards overcoming nihilism we must combat stagnation.

### *1.3: Outlining Nietzsche's Nihilism and the Problem of Repetition*

Nietzsche didn't just warn us about stagnating through interpretation and idolisation. He also found concerns in the base arguments for nihilism itself. In aiming to overcome nihilism he too found reason for trajectory in thought rather than the repetition found in faith systems, idolisation and the village atheist.

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[21] See Benson's *Graven Ideologies* (2002) for an analysis of Nietzsche's understanding of the flaws of philosophy based upon its aspiration to reflect the world in man's image; R. Stephen Krebbs, Jr.s (1997) '"Just Say No": Nietzsche's response to Modern Idolatry' for an analysis of Nietzsche's rejection of idolatry in *TSZ*' W.J.T. Mitchell's (2011) *Idolatry: Nietzsche, Blake and Poussin.*

As we noted earlier, Deleuze' interpretation of the death of God held very specific connotations, which when contextualised within Nietzsche's own predictions of 200 years of nihilism and the events involved, offer us valuable ways to readdress nihilism now. By reading Deleuze' interpretations alongside our findings, we will further contextualise Nietzsche's coming too soon, situating ourselves in a position to explore these ideas within our postmodern context in later chapters. As both these concepts become vital to our argument, Deleuze' ideas must be developed at this early stage for the sake of clarity and understanding.

In its most simple form, Nietzsche's nihilism can be summarised simply *"That the highest values are losing their value"* [author's emphasis] (Nietzsche, 2006: p.5). This nihilism assumes both that ideas of transcendent objects and 'things in themselves' have no grounds for existing as this would render them "either divine or morality incarnate" (Ibid, p.5). Deleuze interprets Nietzsche's nihilism not as signifying non-being, rather "Life takes on a value of nil insofar as it is denied and depreciated" (Deleuze, 2002: p.147). As such, nihilism is not about the chaos of a literal *nothing*, but rather the parameters imposed by modernity as structured by the thought process of those prior – a society based on Christian morals. Whilst a biblical interpretation of human life begins with Adam (from the Hebrew root *Adema*, literally 'soil'), who was created from dirt and breathed to life by the breath of the holy other, we see that humanity was born of something, or rather an amalgamation of the physical and divine. Stripped of divinity we are left with an interesting counterpoint. Whatever ubermensch might emerge, whatever being that is to overcome nihilism, must literally adhere to a structure of *creation ex-nihilo*. Much like the biblical God we must create ourselves from nothing. In doing so any life breathed into us is that which we bring

to the table ourselves. We are replacing ideas of the divine with conscious and projected

thought. In viewing things as such we are accepting that there is no higher power to answer

to, we *are* because we utilised our conscious abilities to *choose* to be.

As an event contemporaneous to Nietzsche, nihilism was not to be defined as the product

of some evil force internal or external to ourselves, rather it is in part the product of the

failings of western Christian thought. It quite literally "harbours in the heart of Christian

morals" (Nietzsche, 2006: p.5). The moral values and truths associated with Christianity

can only be overcome through nihilism because its very nature negates all prior. The

destructive nature of nihilism renders all truths and values null, and in glimpsing this

through the trappings of Christianity (seen as a failure to satisfactorily explain and

cohesively converge a concepts of universal truth/value), we are left with the nihil, quite

literally *the devaluation of all values.*

On viewing nihilism within the context of the earth we are adding principles of space and

time, which implies the birth of nihilism as an event pre-Nietzsche, as well as our

perceived possibility of a *post*-nihilistic world. [22] For Nietzsche the event of nihilism

would imply that of transition, although interestingly for Deleuze, it is "not an event in

history but the motor of history of man as universal history. For Nietzsche one and the

same history is marked out by Judaism, Christianity, the reformation, free thought,

democratic and sociologist ideology", (Deleuze, 2002: p.152). [23]

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22 The implication is simply one of operational status and should not be understood as overtly mathematical, nor the spacetime of physics. Here it is to say that all our operations are subject to space and time as the parameters for existence. We will explore this later in relation to Nietzsche's conception of the eternal recurrence, which offers an alternate view to that of temporality and the spacetime of physics. More on this in Chapter 4.

23 The concept of event for Deleuze has very specific connotation. In *The Deleuze Dictionary,* Cliff Stagoll defines Delezuean event as 'the changes immanent to a confluence of parts or elements, subsisting as pure virtualities (that is real inherent possibilities) and distinguishing themselves only in the course of their actualisation in some body or state'. In these terms an event would not be a definitive and observable form,

However, for Deleuze, nihilism is not an event but rather the grounds in which events must occur. It is an already cyclical system because there has never been the realisation or actualisation of anything *outside* of nihilism, instead only a kinetic structure of half-truths and fallacies built in place of truth. Each surpassing non-event (the reformation, free thought, etc) has simply become another layer of the already complex cyclical system of the nihil. As such the 'event' of nihilism as a dawn recognised by Nietzsche's contemporaries (and only an event inasmuch as it is a recognition of a truth, perhaps the first event) is one that should be understood as a step beyond the cyclical nature of what came before, but perhaps only still a reinterpretation of 'weak faith' by those not willing or unable to see beyond the limitations of their operational sphere. Much like the village atheist, this outlook on history would show that each procession of new ideals still harbours a strong belief in a moral code found previously in Western thought, and as such the value of truth (as subject to power) continues to be void.

In order to move beyond the cyclical and be actualised as 'an event', nihilism shifts from a simple state of *being* and into something more. Nihilism as an event implies that at some point, no matter where in space/time that point may be, it will be surpassed by other events, unless of course the events that take place beyond this point are themselves operating within the parameters of the event of nihilism (and in Deleuzean terms in this

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such as the leaves on a tree becoming green in spring, rather it would be the potentiality *of* the tree becoming green – the potential and effect of the tree 'greening' as process. We can see how this itself, much like Nietzsche's nihilism is dependent on a space/time principle of cause, effect and forward motion as universal subjectification (Parr, 2010). Whether Deleuze' use of 'event' in the above quote is dependent on this principle remains to be seen, as does the question of whether Nietzsche directly influenced the development of this concept. We will be working on the assumption that event has a more literal meaning (indeed, Deleuze has confused readers on other occasions with his changing use of terminology), although later we will see that the Deleuzean conception of event bears significance to the Will to Power as a tool that can initiate the development of an ubermensch.

closed system nihilism would surely not be an event if it is the parameter itself that sets the system in which the event can take place). Presumably the birth of this new event follows that of Christianity's prominence in the west. Following an age of religious meaning, the event of nihilism takes hold and we enter a new phase. Rather than this cycle of historical non-events that Deleuze has laid out, we see for the first time a true event in that nihilism will negate all that came before, rendering it null and providing the nihilist with a new starting point. However, as Nietzsche's predicted nihilism would take hold for a period of two centuries, the time between the Death of God and the dawn of a new age is itself in a state of flux – the village atheist identified by Nietzsche would still hold sway, in turn creating yet another repetition of the cycle.

For Nietzsche, nihilism is considered a necessity, as something that will *triumph.* (Nietzsche, 2006: p. XVII). This begs the question *what is triumph indicative of?* To suggest a triumph, a victory encountered as a succession or overcoming, requires us to understand that nihilism is to act as a progressive step. Nietzsche's want for a shift in thought away from God the Great Comforter towards unparalleled uncertainty and chaos acts as a succession and radical turn in western thinking.

The reflective nature of Christianity, with its adherence to scripture and its emphasis on creeds and doctrines, is carried out through exegesis and exploration on the part of the believer. Whilst an initial glance would suggest the forward thinking nature of such an approach (particularly geared towards our understanding of God as 'the eternal'), when we consider the nature of Christianity from Nietzsche's perspective we see it quite differently.

Its downfall is not on the part of the reflection that is drawn in to question, but rather its inability to unshackle itself *from* itself.

In Part 3 of *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche confirms our interpretation of the above. He describes the Christian faith as being "from the beginning sacrifice: sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit, at the same time enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation" (Nietzsche, 2005: p.75). As a form of sacrifice and an imbalance of power by means of gifting ones' freedom and reason to the eternal, it is inescapably cyclical and binding. [24] By reflecting eternally on the past and calling into question concepts of redemption and faith, the idea of progress is nullified under the weight of its own belief. There can only be progress within the closed system of Christianity, whilst that which falls outside it is rendered static. The future is therefore one built on reflection not with the aim stepping forwards but rather a step into the past. It will always be dependent on God for answers, and therefore it will never surpass itself. Deleuze (2002: p.141) reflects on this, particularly the idea of redemption, which he says is no longer about a 'discharge from debt' but rather a deepened debt, thus the cyclical nature of Christianity is one of a closed system unable to surpass itself. For the nihilist this would stunt any possible growth, yet by its very nature it is the means of operation.

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24 Safranski notes that Nietzsche, who was known as 'the little pastor' as a child had a great deal of difficulty shedding his God. In fact for Safranski this is an undeniable 'submissive tendency'. (Safranski, 2002: p.307-309). This devaluation of life that was so integral to Nietzsche's thought (and perhaps acted as the motor of all Nietzschean thinking) validates deliverance of the message of the Death of God, despite many already rejecting Christian and religious thinking. Once again we see here a nod to the village atheist and those not yet willing to view a godless world. As such Nietzsche's justification is melancholic. In opening his eyes to reality as he perceived it he lost all that was deemed good in the world. Whilst he may consider himself above the village atheist he is not *against* the village atheist, rather he is sympathetic and understanding of the pain that one may encounter upon such an epiphany.

We may question how this differs from nihilism (in that we must explore nihilism in order to overcome it), but without the above mentioned shackle to Christianity, the need for guidance from a past source is voided. This in turn frees us from our grounding and offers the possibility of stepping forward towards the unknown because we are willing to destroy everything. In doing so the event of nihilism is itself a new beginning of a cyclical sort as it is moving to a time both ulterior and prior to meaning through God.

Initially two outlines for nihilism are presented in *The Will to Power:*

> A. nihilism as a sign of *enhanced spiritual strength:* active nihilism.
> B. nihilism as a sign of the *collapse* and *decline* of spiritual *strength:* passive nihilism.

(Nietzsche, 2006: p.12)

The latter of these two concepts is one that lacks the necessary attributes to tackle nihilism head-on, a wallowing of sorts described as a product of weariness, a condition we encounter through our reflective ability. The implication is therefore that nihilism simply is and always will be. The non-existence of truth and values are just that, and will always remain so. For Nietzsche this is not a position we should assume, it is the position of the village atheist. As Robbins makes clear, for Vattimo this is a type of 'weak theology', a term used to denote a "theology of weakness that connects the weakness of God with the ethical imperative to serve the poor and needy" (2007: p.16). Such thinking also applies to Caputo, who "wants to affirm faith, though without absolute or certain knowledge, [and]

he seeks to value religious tradition, while keeping his distance from the actual historic faith communities" (Ibid, pp.15-16).

By pushing nihilism onward, we are destroying even the idea of no values, meaning or truth. For Nietzsche this is "not only the belief that everything deserves to perish; but one actually puts one's shoulder to the plough; *one destroys*" (Nietzsche, 2006: p.12). Whilst this may seem illogical, for the active nihilist there is no need to simply act with logic: even logic must be destroyed if we are to accept the nihil and propose the annihilation of everything.

Nietzsche's reasoning on the advent and acceptance of nihilism is one that stems from pessimism, which he proposes as a strength. Whilst it is, in his own words, a *"logic of Pessimism* [that] *leads finally to nihilism"* (Nietzsche, 2006: p.6) we do not have to accept logic as that which grows from nihilism (as by active nihilism's nature it has destroyed this anyway). Instead we should accept that whilst logic has led us to the outlook of a nihilist, in arriving we can destroy logic because it has served its purpose as the vehicle that has carried us to our first destination. In his book, *On Religion,* Caputo argues that this nihilism itself makes all critiques merely perspectives, constructions or fictions of grammar, that "critiques of religion have come undone under the gun of Nietzsche's critique of the possibility of making a critique that would cut to the quick – of God, nature or history" (2001: pp.59-60). This theory of a literal destruction of *everything* poses a problem of inescapability for the nihilist.

In such instances we might question whether this 'logic of nihilism', quite oxymoronic in its nature, should be an end to this argument. However, as we shall see, nihilism has taken

a very different turn in the intervening years since Nietzsche declared the death of God. If we are to overcome nihilism through the realisation of ubermensch, then we must progress to understand this reimagining of nihilism in our next chapter.

## *1.4: Chapter Summary & Conclusion*

Nietzsche chose to make his true intentions mostly inaccessible to the masses of his time. Even the educated and privileged few, as seen in the village atheist, rejected his concepts and instead opted to cling old structures of faith. By utilising decadence, he constructed a viewpoint that in turn safeguarded his thought from weak interrogation and casual reading, at least in theory – the use of subversive masks and multiple iterations of himself through the varying characters in his texts. This added an esoteric aspect to his works (and by shamelessly plugging to his small readership, also gave the reader a boost), because he opted to write for those who sat *away* from the herd. Whilst the effect was great, the practical results have been less than satisfying, and over 100 years later there is still much debate as to what Nietzsche meant. We note that the issues of historicity and appropriation of Nietzsche's thought are evidenced here, perhaps even put into play by Nietzsche himself in the development of masks and his esoteric approach.

However, we argue that in identifying his rejection of becoming an idol, that Nietzsche's intent was to provide ground for readers to think *trans*-Nietzsche, where the trans-Nietzschean acts to safeguard us from stagnation and repetition. We also note that Nietzsche's nihilism is grounded in a similar and concurrent path of thought, where

different approaches to nihilism feed in to and rise above the act itself; we find these repetitions of passive nihilism, but in the active we see farther emphasis on the *trans;* on moving beyond nihilism by seeking new operational grounds.

If we are to proceed with the overcoming of nihilism through the creation of ubermensch, we must therefore remember the importance of employing an active form of nihilism whilst being cautious of the many repetitions and acts of weak passive nihilism we may find, particularly in the guise of the village atheist.

# CHAPTER 2: REIMAGINING NIHILISM IN POSTMODERNITY

The years following Nietzsche's death saw great scientific and technological advances, alongside a shift in continental philosophy that radically opposed previous traditions. In this chapter we will look at how these advances impact our understandings of nihilism in the present. Using Ashley Woodward's comprehensive guide *Nihilism in Postmodernity* as our starting point we will draw particular focus on thinkers Jean Baudrillard and Gianni Vattimo, whose understandings of nihilism in the postmodern era shift the focus from interiority and the existential towards a global and socio-political view. Reframing nihilism in the present allows for a new interpretations based upon our operations after the structural collapse of meaning. We will see that the idea of the village atheist is alive and well, and in agreement with Woodward, show that the employment of an active nihilism is needed to overcome this new interpretation. Finally, we will understand how the collapse of universal structures as proposed by the postmodern thinkers runs concurrent with Nietzsche's own masks; each acting as signifiers based upon contextual meaning, plunging us into a world of semiotic theory that Nietzsche acted as omen for. Woodward's ideas culminate with a call for us to explore a form of Deleuzean repetition, itself stemming Nietzsche's eternal return. [25] In agreement with Woodward, we will map out the idea of difference and repetition in light of the postmodern age. This in turn will allow us to begin to formulate the conception of ubermensch in the remaining chapters.

## 2.1: Understandings of Nihilism in Postmodernity

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[25] Whilst we engage with Deleuze' theory of difference and repetition somewhat in this chapter, the direct link to the Nietzschean eternal return is farther explored in Chapter 4, where we apply the theory directly to ubermensch.

In *Nihilism in Postmodernity,* Ashley Woodward traces nihilism from Nietzsche to our present, situating it in what is frequently referred to as the postmodern era. [26] Defining postmodernism itself is no easy task, and Woodward notes conflicting and contradictory definitions, with some commentators even suggesting the idea itself is hopelessly incoherent (2009: p.13). [27] In fact, one of the largest criticisms levied at postmodern thought is the ambiguity of its nature; a reliance on deconstruction and an end to the metaphysics of the past. This places the problem of nihilism on difficult ground, where many of the thinkers dealing with nihilism in the postmodern era don't think it can be overcome, as any attempts to do so will lead to a return to metaphysics and therefore fictions. Instead they opt to operate within nihilism, employing their own methodologies to do so. Woodward, however, believes that it is possible to do so with a return to Nietzsche, more specifically a Deleuzean interpretation of.

The concept of the postmodern is considered active in many forms of academia and the arts, which in turn leads to this multitude of conflicting ideas, but Woodward defends this as beneficial, claiming the concept "captures many diverse aspects of culture within the horizon of a general theory of the contemporary situation (ibid, p.13). However, the major

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[26] Sire (1976) finds the earliest uses of the term *postmodernism* in architecture, but believes Lyotard first signified a shift towards cultural analysis; see also Jameson's definition of postmodernism as the 'cultural logic of late capitalism' in the 1991 book of the same name [see Chapter 3 for an expansion on this concept via Mark Fisher]. Kuznar (2008: p.78) considers the primary tenets of postmodernism as 1) elevation of language and text as fundamental components of existence; 2) applying analytical literary components to all phenomena; 3) scrutinising reality and representation; 4) critiquing metanarratives; 5) arguments against method and evaluation; 6) a focus on power relations and hegemony; 7) a general critique of Western institutions and knowledge.

[27] Critiques of postmodernism include Bishop's rejection based on the self-indulgence of subjectivity and "exaggerating the esoteric and unique aspects of a culture at the expense of more prosaic but significant questions" (1996: p. 58); McKinley's (2000: pp.16-18) rejection of postmodernism as closer to a religion than a science; Rosenau (1993) rejects in part on grounds of the theoretical standpoint of it's anti-theoretical position.

issue is the definition itself. A largely deconstructive act, postmodernism has different

meanings and interpretations for most of the thinkers associated with it, although there are

emergent themes (such as deconstruction) that are prevalent with many of the key thinkers.

At its most base, the concept might best be understood as Lyotard defines it in *The*

*Postmodern Condition,* where he explores the condition of knowledge in the most highly

developed societies. He defines the postmodern itself as "incredulity toward

metanarratives" (1979: ibid, p.xxiv), essentially identifying the failings of fables in light of

scientific and technological progress. It's a concept not entirely at odds with Nietzsche's

rejection of the Christian narrative, and as such Nietzsche is often seen as a precursor to

postmodernism. [28] In his essay *Machinic Desire,* Nick Land outlined this link, pointing to

Nietzsche's critique of Kantian philosophy. He outlines the issue with Kant thus: Kant's

transcendental philosophy critiques transcendent synthesis (the projection of productive

relations beyond their zone of effectiveness), but fails to do so against their genesis, which

he continues to perceive as transcendent, thus making it a miracle or rendering it flawed

(2011: p.321). [29]

After Nietzsche, Woodward proposes thinkers who can loosely be tagged as part of the

existentialist movement, and key players in the development of nihilism. He expresses a

need for us to be aware of the differences thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre

as "grandfathers of nihilism", who themselves sit outside of the general thought of the

modern era, as such pre-cursors to the postmodern in a catalytic sense rather than historical

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[28] The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* notes modernism as movement supporting change, specifically working in the post-Enlightenment tradition as outlined by thinkers such as Kant. (2008: p.237).
[29] Land also traces this thinking and rejection of the Kantian ideal through the works of Deleuze and Guattari, also applying this same logic to their development of schizoanalysis, a rejection of the Freudian psychoanalysis, as presented in their works *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Land, 2011: p.321).

(ibid: p.26). [30] Woodward also notes that each of the above outline and approach nihilism differently. In his reading, one of the base issues for Nietzsche is that of suffering, and human awareness of this. As he says, consciousness allows the awareness and in turn the ability to interpret it in a multitude of ways. At its most basic level, this is expressed as a demand for meaning as to *why* we suffer. It is not the suffering itself that causes the most pain, rather the lack of meaning as to why (ibid: p.32).

Woodward highlights the value of active nihilism, and as he puts it, "if active nihilism runs its course, it ends in the negation of belief in the "highest values" as necessary sources of value" (ibid: p.39). He identifies this as a form of radical nihilism, which in doing the above leads to what he deems a *complete nihilism.* He describes it thus -

> Complete nihilism wipes away the categories of thought perpetuated by religious
> nihilism, removing not only belief in the existence of the highest values, but also
> the belief that transcendent values are necessary for valuation of any kind.
>
> (Ibid: p.39)

Identifying the place (or lack) of value in transcendence, the concept of complete nihilism allows for an understanding of value removed from transcendent concepts. In complete nihilism we can see how the Death of God itself could act as a milestone in philosophical

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[30] In his essay *Nihilism In Heidegger's Being and Time,* Siby K. George outlines Heidegger's nihilism as 'partial nihilism'. As he goes on to say, the Heidegger's nihilism might best be understood as "[not] in the sense of the philosophical claim that nothing actually exists or even that there is actually no meaning at all in human existence." Rather, Siby understands it as signifying that humans can "make their existence meaningful, but not in reference to something everlasting and all-good, like the concept of God, but in reference to one's own self, one's individuality." (2003: p.91). Han-Pile (2013) understands Sartre's nihilism as a choosing of a fundamental project whereby the creation of all of ones values is integral, viewed as a voluntaristic act by which freedom creates value by the sole fact of recognition that it is such.

thinking, not purely in itself, but also as a step away from interiority. Even if Nietzsche's thinking may favour the individual, it is not value that is found from the perspective of the individual as transcendent potential, but rather value exists extraneous to this. Woodward identifies that "questions of meaning pervade collective social arrangements and cultural conditions, and are political insofar as they impinge on our collective "being together,"" which in turn leads to meaning (and its lack) emerging within the complex net of social relations and cultural conditions (2009: p.242). The pattern of thinking found in the postmodern requires us to identify nihilism and value as political *because* they impact on societies. Nihilism in postmodernity cries out to the village atheist and begs to be interrogated on grounds that it impacts all. Rather than the sly nihilism that whispered at Nietzsche's ear, it is now in the open. That does not, however, mean that it is any less of a challenge.

## 2.2: Outlining Baudrillard's Nihilism of the Hyperreal Simulacra

As Woodward (2009: p.119) notes, much like other post-structuralist thinkers, Baudrillard's nihilism is problematic. [31] Baudrillard is most often portrayed as occupying a position of hopelessness and uncertainty, disregarding the effective criteria of critical analysis and considered by many as a passive nihilist, a form of nihilism that this thesis disregards as a form of progression. However, Woodward takes bold steps to recast Baudrillard in a new light. One of the major issues with Baudrillard's work is the lack of clarity in terminology, which leads to difficulty understanding precisely what his work means. Much like Nietzsche, academic interpretation is polarised and it could be

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[31] Woodward notes that none of the thinkers he focuses on actually believe nihilism can be overcome. Rather they think in terms of nihilism providing a playground within which we operate. (2009: p.119)

considered that the task of analysing nihilism is just as meaningless as the concept of nihilism itself. [32] Woodward's answer to this is to employ the thinking of Rex Butler, who rather than working in the tradition of post-Marxist thought and Critical Theory, engages with Baudrillard on his own terms. Woodward is careful to find his own criticism with Butler (based on his concentration on the *form* of Baudrillard's thinking), which he circumnavigates by also employing thinkers such as Genosko and Gane; the former reading Baudrillard through semiotic and linguistic theory, the latter who focuses in the shifts in Baudrillard's position over time (Woodward: 2009, p.89). As we read Woodward's interpretations alongside our own development, we will note the idea of both semiosis and the simulacra become key to future developments we will make.

Whilst much of Baudrillard's work considered themes of nihilism, it is perhaps in *Simulacra and Simulation* that his key ideas are most clearly outlined. As a postmodern thinker, Baudrillard's approach was poststructural and relied on an understanding of nihilism that surpassed the individual in favour of the universal. Baudrillard likens contemporary society to a form of abstraction (he uses the example of Borges' map fable), saying -

> Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreality. The

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[32] Baudrillard's own editor, Mark Poster (2001: p.8) notes the lack of clarity in works prior to the mid-1980's, but defends his approach as a stylistic choice fixed on experiences as singular foci. For further critiques of Baudrillard's work see Dutton (1990) *Jean Baudrillard;* Andrew Robinson's *Jean Baudrillard and Activism: A Critique* (2013)*;* King's *A critique of Baudrillard's hyperreality: towards a sociology of postmodernism.*

territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is never the less the

map that precedes the territory - *precession of simulacra* -

(Baudrillard: 1994, p.1) [33]

The hyperreal itself is explained as "the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated

generation of differences" (ibid: pp.2-3). Reality has become subject to the liquidation of

our referential points, which he sees as artificially resurrected as a semiotic system of signs

and symbols with no truth behind them (ibid, p.3) - an idea not unlike the understanding of

Nietzschean masks developed in the previous chapter of this thesis; our issue contends that

Nietzsche's varying levels of subversion made obtaining concrete guidance problematic,

and that the act of subversion itself *is* catalytic if understood in the argument we

developed. For Baudrillard, nihilism in the present has moved even beyond the death of

God, it is a nihilism of transparency, the radical, and one that has been realised not through

destruction but through simulation and deterrence (ibid, p.159). He understands simulation

as that which is opposed to representation; representation finds its root in the idea of an

equivalence of the sign *and* of the real, whereas simulation is rooted in the "utopia of the

principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value,* from the sign as

the reversion and death sentence of every reference" (ibid, p.6).

To contextualise this, we may view representation as the attempt to *show*, where showing

acts to attempt equivalence of the real, but works as a cypher. Woodward understands this

as a goal to eradicate all imperfection (2009: p.96). Woodward notes that should the

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[33] The Borges Map fable is credited to Jorge Luis Borges, from his one paragraph story *On Exactitude of Science.* Here an empire is imagined where cartography becomes a precise skill that no ordinary map would satisfy, so a map of the empire in a one to one scale is produced. In his opening paragraph, Baudrillard uses this example to explain the second order of simulacra (Baudrillard: 1994, p.1).

distance between the two close and contact is lost, then the representation has to produce *its own* real (Ibid, p.96). This itself becomes a hyperreality - the ramshackle dinosaur built from mixed bones; Lord Nelson wearing an eye patch; the meek white-skinned Jesus.

Unlike representation, simulation acts as a copy in the purest of sense. Rather than acting to signify extra, it exists wholly as the double of an original, to capture the essence of an original for no sake beyond the inherent. There are however problems to be found with this. Baudrillard thinks that the simulation "envelops the system (edifice) of representation as simulacrum." (1994: p.6). The simulacra is identified as follows -

it is the reflection of a profound reality;

it masks and denatures a profound reality;

it masks the *absence* of a profound reality;

it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum

(Ibid, p.6) [34]

## *2.2.a: Baudrillard's Understanding of Signs and Symbolic Exchange in Postmodern Nihilism*

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[34] For a brutally blunt yet remarkably readable explanation of Baudrillard's *Sim et Sim*, see Carey's article in *Continent* (Issue 2.2/2012), where he outlines the precession of simulacra as so: 1. A basic reflection as a photo of your girlfriend; 2. A perversion of basic reality (you airbrush the picture to make her more aesthetically pleasing); 3. A masking of an absence of basic reality (it's not your girlfriend in the picture, you just tell people she is); 4. It bears no relation to any reality (you drew her in computer software).

Baudrillard also understands objects of the real (i.e. pre-existing aspects of reality) as removed from our semio-linguistic attempts to capture them, because at best we can only ever project the *idea* of the object. The conclusion drawn is that deconstruction of signs can never take place in the name of the real, since "these categories are the very alibis that found the order of signification," (Woodward, 2009: p.94). This results in a transparency within contemporary nihilism where simulation no longer refers to an independent real, instead confusing models and their referents (Ibid, p.97). This leads to nihilism in contemporary culture based upon the dissolution of meaning. With each degree of progress, the anchors of history are eroded by expansion (Ibid, p.97).

Baudrillard traces this idea through Western concepts of God, through the iconoclastic movement which he sees as substituting god. In fact, Baudrillard suggests that whilst the concept of the icon existing as a divine representation and gateway to the transcendent, that deep down God never existed, meaning that even God himself is nothing but his own simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994: p.4). Icon worshippers are therefore 'the most modern of minds' because they are already "enacting his [God] death and his disappearance in the epiphany of his representations." (Ibid, p.5). Without God, the exchange of signs falls flat. Without God, exchange is impossible as there is no meaning to be granted as the return. What we are left with is a succession of distortions that act as masks between polarities on an endless Nietzschean tightrope.

In Baudrillard's writing, Woodward finds a theory of 'symbolic exchange'. Conceptually, this refers to what he believes existed in pre-capitalistic societies. Channelling Mauss, he understands this in terms of 'gift-giving', which take place within a network of cultural

symbols. In turn these act as the social bonds within an economy of symbolic exchange (Woodward, 2009: p.91). Woodward sees this distinction between pre-capitalist systems and the capitalist systems of the present as fundamental aspects of understanding signs, and in turn nihilism. He writes –

> Unlike capitalist political economy, which abstracts objects from their cultural meaning and subjects them to a specific (and therefore non-ambiguous) law of value, symbolic exchange is ambiguous, reversible, and constitutes a challenge in the form of the obligatory counter-gift... For Baudrillard, societies based on these principles of ambiguity and reversibility are richer in "existential" meaning than capitalist societies, since they allow socially meaningful exchanges and interactions that are eroded by the abstraction of capitalist exchange.

> (Woodward, 2009: p.91) [35]

Despite capitalism as a dominant mode of political operation in Nietzsche's time, we must consider the implications of capitalism now, and we must filter it through the lens of the village atheist. If we are to understand Baudrillard (and Woodward's reading of him), then the forms of nihilism present in capitalism have run concurrent to Christianity and faith, but with an overlap that sees the rise of one and the demise of the other. In pre-capitalist societies life was dominated by the structures of faith, but gradually eroded with the

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[35] Baudrillard's *Impossible Exchange* expands on this idea. He outlines a form of nihilism based on the world having no double or 'mirror', "it has no equivalent anywhere; it cannot be exchanged for anything" (2001: p.1). He then outlines the issue with spheres of politics and economy; no doubles with which they can be exchanged (Ibid, pp.1-8). He then goes on to note a Nietzschean discovery of this in the form of God the Great Creditor, a suggestion much like that we have identified previously by Deleuze as the cyclical method of exchange of sin as debt.

passage of time (Ibid, p.92). At the time of Nietzsche's writing, the Industrial Revolution

had already taken large steps towards the mechanisation of both the workplace and society.

A second industrial age (or technological age) was under way, with expansion of rail and

telegraph networks allowing for greater freedom of movement and transportation. The

development of sewage systems and electrical streetlights led to the potential for better

conditions and longer working hours. Darwin's evolutionary theory cast doubt on previous

understandings of our origins, and science and reason had comfortably taken their seat in

the public eye. For the village atheist, the figure that rejected God but not the foundational

structures that defined him, capitalism provided a comfort of opportunity.

Baudrillard understands capital as a 'sorcery of relations' and a 'challenge to society' that

needs responding to on its own terms. It must be challenged in accordance with symbolic

law (Baudrillard, 1994: p.15). Of his theories of hyperreality and simulation in relation to

capital, he says the following:

> Hyperreality and simulation are deterrents of every principle and every objective,
>
> they turn against power the deterrent that is used so well for such a long time.
>
> Because in the end, throughout its history it was capital that first fed on the
>
> destructuration of ever referential, of every human objective, that shattered every
>
> ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a
>
> radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power.

(Baudrillard, 1994: p.22)

In capital he finds a liquidation of all value and all equivalence of production and wealth (Ibid, p.22); production and wealth offer no alternative because there is no other in the impossible exchange, instead there is only the accumulation of signifiers that mask nothing beyond their own self-referential system of masks. Baudrillard says similar of power, itself producing no more than signs of resemblance in the postmodern world. In fact, he suggests that there is a collective *demand* for signs of power - what he calls a "holy union that is reconstructed around it's disappearance" (Ibid, p.23). It is a system that the world adheres to through fear of political collapse, and the power itself becomes no more than the "*critical* obsession with power - obsession with its death, obsession with its survival, which increases as it disappears," (ibid, p.23). Simply put, capitalism has become the newest spectre cast on the cave walls.

In light of this, the village atheist can now be understood as the privileged and educated societal figure from a background much like Nietzsche himself. Whilst the poor clung to the structures of old, the village atheist rejected God in favour of the instant; workers toiled for pittance to secure a place in heaven, the higher classes and captains of industry found fulfilment in the rejection of God and the accumulation of capital, with wealth and comfort providing pleasure within their lifetime. Under such readings, capitalism is itself a form of passive nihilism.

### 2.2.b: Using Baudrillardian Semiotics to Understand Postmodern Capitalism as a Repetitions of Passive Nihilism

In the *TSZ* chapter entitled *Of the New Idol,* Nietzsche speaks clearly of the state. He announces that it is "the coldest of all monsters," and that it is a beast built on lies; lies that equate to its presence as a spirit of the people. (2003: p.75). He identifies the state almost as a form of cultural embodiment that is capable of adapting and bending to wills. The state transcends place in as much as it operates in many places, but what constitutes the state in one may be entirely different to the way it operates and is understood in others, but the fact remains that a form of state is present in each. Nietzsche identifies this as the will to death (Ibid, p.76). He then references the state as a product of the superfluous, of a rising population that becomes reliant on a form of state for survival. However, this isn't just limited to those he deems weak, rather the state is so powerful that even those of clear philosophical mind succumb to its power (Ibid, p.76). The acquisition of wealth becomes the goal, and a form of power and *degree* of power, (i.e. money). There is a clambering to what is clearly identified as the void, and only after the state has been diminished and destroyed can the ubermensch begin (p.77). [36]

Kaufmann identifies the state as a "corollary of his [Nietzsche's] value theory," and says that the state is depreciated not because it disadvantages life, but rather that it prevents man from realising himself (1968: p.163). He even finds it an un-Christian concept because of its ability to intimidate man into conformity through appropriation of power (Kaufmann, p.164). This thinking is not limited solely to the state but rather active across all political

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[36] In *Human, All Too Human,* Nietzsche draws on Macchiavelli to understand the great goal of the state as duration: "Machiavelli says that 'the form of government signifies very little, even though semi-educated people think otherwise. The great goal of statecraft should be *duration,* which outweighs everything else, inasmuch as it is much more valuable than freedom." (2005: p.108).

spheres. Nietzsche identifies the kingdom of God in the hearts of men, but as Kaufmann says:

> Nietzsche accuses Christianity of having betrayed this fundamental insight from the beginning, whether by transferring the kingdom into *another* world and thus depreciating *this* life, or by becoming political and seeking salvation through organizations, churches, cults, sacraments or priests.
>
> (Ibid, p.165)

Tracing a similar path, Trubody defines this as the 'Aesthetic of Capitalism.' He rightly sees this as an attempt to purify experience and "treat reality as an object to be manipulated into artificial categories" (Trubody, 2012: p.11) This forces life and experiences into presupposed divides. Rather than providing a gateway for the understanding of experience, it folds each in order to package it into the expected or explained; in essence it provides another framework for God, only this version transcends religion by situating itself both in and outside of it, and across any number of faiths. It is truly globalized. It is this that constitutes Trubody's 'Aesthetic of Capitalism'. There are still distinctions between good and bad, but the pursuit for happiness is linked with a good that requires categorical consumption based on enjoyment and 'improved well-being' (Ibid, p.12).

For Trubody, the correlation between capitalism and religion is undeniable from the perspective of the nihilist. In this respect he also posits the strong correlation between Nietzsche and Baudrillard via the development of the postmodern that we have argued thus far. Trubody's identification of reason as an exercise of aesthetics is important: "reasoning

itself is seen as performing an aesthetic function, it can give meaning to life by allowing the individual to have an intelligible understanding of their existence" (Ibid, p.2). Citing Shutte, he notes that reason gives form and meaning to things, but is ultimately sterile due to a form of alienation. It functions as removed from the dynamic of artistic process (Ibid, p.2), and is therefore an attempt at a pure logic of experience. However, there is also an inherent artistic creativity in the theoretical process in that it aims to 'give' meaning. According to Trubody, the abstraction of life through theory is alienating for Nietzsche, but if that theory is life enhancing then it becomes an artistic endeavour, and as such becomes justified in its use. Nietzsche finds this alienating mode of reasoning to be "Socratism", a term denoting life as abstracted and forced into artificial categories to try and logically order and legitimise existence. (Ibid, p.3)

Trubody cites Nietzsche's prioritising of the *real* over the apparent as the only thing of meaning, and preserving and enhancing this is crucial to determining value (Ibid, p.3). It is through dismissing and denying the apparent (i.e. God) that we find the real, a form of rawness, via the Will to Power (which will be discussed in some detail in chapter 4). He identifies that Baudrillard no longer believes in a real *because* of reproduction and simulation. Baudrillard's thinking therefore removes the priority of the human because of the lack of real, and when coupled with our understanding of semiotics and the correlation between the real in itself vs. our linguistic inability to capture the real, we can understand the need for this shift from Nietzsche's near-existential interpretation to one that lies beyond.

Citing a succession in religious thinking that eventually led to the prioritisation of the apparent over the real, Trubody views this shift as a dynamic of replacement. The world of God (i.e. the apparent as ordered by institutional religion, the gathering and collation of formal doctrine, exegesis, etc) through succession of institutional obedience, became the *real.* Truth can only be experienced through God. The real world (our real world) in turn is replaced with the apparent, but unlike our own development of this theory, Trubody wonders whether the solution lie within the creation of art (Ibid, p.4). He highlights this in Nietzsche's own work, highlighting Nietzsche's suggestion in *Twilight of Idols* that we can immunise against the illness that stems from Christianity through the use of art as an intoxicant (Ibid, pp.5-6). As such, art re-affirms the sickness and ecstasy of life that forces indifference to moral imperatives upon us (Ibid, p.4) [37] Trubody offers his theory that the capitalist aesthetic has replaced the religious aesthetic. As he says:

> The capitalist aesthetic supports and promotes Nietzsche's alienating forms of reasoning, which in turn sustains the dualisms that he sought to annihilate. What-is-more, if we are unable to combat this new aesthetic experience and escape from the alienating forms of reasoning, *art* as understood by Nietzsche becomes impossible.

> (Ibid, p.10)

He then goes on to identify a slave-master relationship in Baudrillard's work, similar to that developed by Nietzsche. We will briefly outline Nietzsche's for us to better understand

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[37] Deleuze believes Nietzsche has a "tragic conception of art", but also that it acts as a "stimulant for the will to power" that can only be utilised as affirmative in a positive instance of force, like the will to power (Deleuze, 2009: p.95).

this. In *BG&E* Nietzsche develops the idea in section 260, outlining master (or noble) morality a something 'good', that stems from (and includes) proud states of mind, vs. 'bad' states that are cowardly or lowly. This in-itself creates a kind of hierarchy, where the noble person understands their duty towards other noble-types, but not necessarily to those below them. These solid 'good' qualities overflow, and this overflowing allows for the aiding of those below them. This becomes a type of value creation. In contrast, slave morality is a rejection of the morality found in master or noble-types. The focus is on the relief from suffering and escape from oppression, where escaping noble values becomes the highest aim. Nietzsche believes both qualities exist in people, but the desire for a higher-type is integral to his thinking (2003: pp.194-205)

Following his development of a theory of consumption in *The Consumer Society,* Trubody draws on Baudrillard's idea that systems of need does *not* precede the enjoyment of an object, rather both are separate, "They are produced as system elements, not as relationships of individual to an object" (Ibid, p.10).

In this instance he conceives of the slave-master relationship as follows:

> Where people believe their desires to be part of a supply and demand relationship amongst which lies the perfect holiday, car, or pair of shoes but in fact they are complicit in creating desires for a 'lived experience' that does not exist, a world that cannot exist as it is a product of a system of production.
>
> (Ibid, p.10)

Of consumption, he says the following:

> Consumption becomes a function of production which engineers 'desire', so any
> enjoyment derived from this process is actually a 'denial of enjoyment' as one
> becomes the functional expression of a collective productive process which has no
> end. The individual sees themselves as an object, to be pampered - in essence to
> consume one-self.
>
> (Ibid, p.11)

Baudrillard's essay *Hypermarket and Hypercommodity,* talks of the 'circular response'
found in the message exchange function of the consumer. With objects devolved into
semiotics, he believes the system feeds itself perpetually without resolution or key
exchange. He says the following:

> At the deepest level, another kind of work is at issue here, the work of
> acculturation, of confrontation, of examination, of the social code, and of the
> verdict: people go there to find and to select objects - responses to all the questions
> they may ask themselves; or, rather, they themselves come in response to the
> functional and directed question that the objects constitute.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1994: p.75)

He understands this as going beyond consumption, resituating itself in a place where the
primacy is now the circular arrangement itself. If we draw on these Baudrillardian semio-
linguistic approaches to nihilism and understand it as the dissolution of order and the rise

of hypercontextualism, particularly recalling Baudrillard's theories on pre-capitalist society, then we can emphasise Trubody's approach. We might also see evidence for our trans-Nietzschean approach in the masks of semiotics, which in turn suggests a drive onwards rather than wallowing within nihilism. Such an approach doesn't deconstruct postmodernism and nihilism to the extent that there is no overcoming, rather it invigorates the act of continuation and event. Further developments in our understanding of nihilism will require us to better explore the machinations of capitalism as a form of passive nihilism, and investigate the embrace of the village atheist with particular attention to how ubermensch can be realised under the new forms of nihilism. In the next chapter we will undertake this task, but before doing so we must turn our attention to Vattimo.

## 2.3: Finding a Positive Inversion in Vattimo's Nihilism of Passivity

In Vattimo, Woodward finds a type of positive nihilism which turns traditional understandings on their head; rather than a problem to be solved it is in itself a solution: rather than negating the human it is our chance for social emancipation (2009: p.102). Rather than use the term to denote a problem of existential meaning, he instead uses it to forms of antifoundationalism of ontological and epistemological order, viewing reality as devoid of objective structure, permanence and inherent truths (Ibid, p.103). [38] Vattimo's key theory is "weak thought", an antifoundationalist idea on the impossibility of "a decisive overcoming of metaphysics" (Ibid, 103). [39] It's an idea that Vattimo draws not

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[38] Vattimo claims that the Italian tradition of thought from which he stems is inseparable from this own thinking, instead understanding the two as wholly intertwined. (2009: p.103)

[39] Harris tells us that Vattimo refuses to see the history of metaphysics as error, "but as a normative way of thinking." Metaphysics has "entailed truth being conceived in terms of correspondence to already designated

from his contemporaries, but by the thinkers of nihilism who have come before, stemming

back to Nietzsche himself. [40] By focussing on the mid-period works of Nietzsche

(particularly *TGS, Untimely Meditations*), Vattimo identifies a type of deconstruction of

metaphysics within Nietzsche, which cancels any conception of new foundations in

thought. As such, he places Nietzsche as a thinker "at the end of metaphysics who is

struggling to find a way beyond it" (Ibid: p.105).

Woodward then says the following of Vattimo:

> The idea of a foundation for thought that would secure true knowledge
>
> depends on the idea that it is possible to know things in themselves, but this
>
> possibility is also undermined by Nietzsche through his argument that
>
> "knowledge of a thing is the result of a series of metaphoric transformations
>
> that take place between the thing and our understanding of it.

<div align="right">(2009: p.106)</div>

In his book with Caputo, *After the Death of God,* Vattimo recalls Heidegger's thought on

truth as subjectivity and open to interpretation; all views are granted by those in the world

(2007: p.28). Vattimo points to scientists, whose reliance on structures of trust in the form

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norms from the ground until the death of God, that is, until the end of metaphysics heralded by Nietzsche's
announcement to that effect." (2015: p.10)

[40] Vattimo's readings of both Nietzsche and Heidegger are antifoundational in essence. He argues that these
thinkers' approaches must be understood in a positive light, thus read as rebuttal and proposal against the
problem of metaphysical foundationalism that they diagnose (Woodward, 2009: p.105).

of past scientific work (and the assumptions made as a result) form the basis of experiment.

Investigations take the place under the conditions of assumption, and from these

assumptions the path is governed for an outcome. Vattimo sees this not only in science, but

in all forms inquiry and thought, even in language (Ibid, pp.27-28). [41] In turn this means

culture and reason is itself varied and not universal (Ibid, pp.30-31). He goes on to say the

following –

> The matter of interpretation is now configured in this way: interpretation is the idea
>
> that knowledge is not the pure, uninterested reflection of the real, but the interested
>
> approach to the world, which is itself historically mutable and culturally
>
> conditioned.

(Vattimo, 2007: p.31)

### 2.3.a: Using Vattimo to Pose the Problem of an Inescapable Postmodern Nihilism

For Vattimo, the announcement of the Death of God confirms there is no objective

structure to the world. It is not an atheistic position because this would imply that there *is*

an objective structure to the world, one in which god does not exist (2009: p.107).

Woodward states that Vattimo's view is not particularly unique or new, but it's the nuance

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[41] Vattimo also sees philosophy of science talk about the formulation of phenomena by placing it in artificial systems, maths formulas and languages as games - each have their own rules that don't apply to the other, but it doesn't make any one or the other wrong (2007: pp.32-33). These ideas will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4, where we apply such concepts to possible ubermensch developments through the work of Keith Ansell-Pearson.

that is of value, and that the Death of God, "understood as nihilism, is a condition that cannot be transcended" (Ibid, p.107). In Vattimo's *The End of Modernity* the idea of the death of God is understood as "the generalisation of exchange value in our society" (1988: p.36). For Vattimo, this means that there is no overcoming as this would imply a new foundation. Rather, what Nietzsche would call *complete* or *accomplished* nihilism. Vattimo believes it must be understood "precisely as the condition in which the belief in foundations, including the possibility of a new foundation, is entirely dissolved" (2009: p.108). In Harris' reading of, Vattimo, the death of god takes on further meaning, representing "the collective loss of a need for certainty as a result of improvements in science and technology that have removed our worst fears, making life more bearable" (2015: p.10). This has resulted in a monotheistic mixture of murder and suicide, realized in the murder of god not through unbelief but faith (ibid, p.10). As Harris goes on to point out, Vattimo's death of God "is not a flat-footed atheistic denial of God's existence," rather Vattimo seeks to avoid the repetition of metaphysical logic (ibid, p.11). By doing so, Vattimo is able to avoid rereading theologies into the world by shifting the hermeneutic focus from the analysis of religious texts to a reading of cultural interpretation – dissolution of the village atheist as the repeater of the theological. Rather than seek an ultimate truth in the form of metaphysics, he instead looks at reconfigurations of local experience, the new politicised nihilism *re-politicised* already as positive affirmation of nihilism. This issue, however, is that it runs the risk of re-entering Baudrillard's semiotic exchange on a microscale.

Vattimo rejects the idea of overcoming as this requires a form of new foundationalism, so Being is placed historically and is subject to history, with new interpretations taking place

all the time. The current configuration of Being is not one based upon an ability to overcome, rather, current configurations are based on the thoughts of the past (2009: p.113). Understood simply, Vattimo's thought suggests we can only exist *within* metaphysics. There is no overcoming to take place because foundations have been dissolved and can never be rebuilt (they are non-existent), but instead there are the possibilities of new fields of discovery and understanding that could theoretically move away from the nostalgia of structures. Vattimo directly draws on Lyotard's idea of 'the end of metanarratives', but for Vattimo to understand the postmodern we must provide an interpretation of the meaning of being at the end of modernity. Vattimo sees this as the advent of postmodernity coinciding with nihilism as a completion (2009: p.150). This is understood through secularisation, which has roots in modernity and becomes decisive in postmodernism. In conjunction, Being itself deteriorates. There is a dissolution of Being and God, and as such the foundational elements of thought, truth, and society (Ibid, p. 150).

Vattimo understands the end of history as a consequence and signifier of nihilism. He understands history as a game of cultural masters, namely what he terms European Man. He states:

> The idea of a progressive temporal process, and even of such a thing as history, belongs to a cultural of masters. As a linear unity history is actually only the history

of those in power, of the victors. It is constituted at the cost of excluding, first in

practice and then in recollection, an array of possibilities, values and images.

(Ibid, pp.150-151)

In Woodward's understanding, for Vattimo there are ultimately many narratives and

perspectives on history that sit outside of the dominant western (and largely male)

interpretations, all of which hold no more or less value. The delinearisation of history is

therefore the effect we see (Ibid, pp.151-152). Vattimo also identifies, contra Adorno and

Horkheimer's predictions of mass-media leading to a homogenisation of society, that

media has actually led to an explosion of alternative views. [42]  In a recent paper, Harris

develops the view that information and communications technology allow for the reporting

of events as simultaneous actions, each holding its own perspective and interpretation. He

sees this as reducing objectivity and blurring (possibly even collapsing) the distinction

between the 'real' and 'apparent' worlds (2015: p.15). In turn this (particularly social

media and the compartmentalisation of facets of selfhood into handy 'apps') impacts on

our understanding of metaphysics. For Vattimo it is an 'end' of sorts, in that technology

forces us to confront narratives. However, for Harris more recent technological advances

cause us to return to metaphysics in the favouring of 'I'; he finds examples of this in

products made by Apple; the iphone, ipad; internet cookies storing preferences, etc (2015:

pp.28-33).[43] In these cases the individual prioritises existence through the fracturing of

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[42] See recent controversy political news and Counselor Conway's use of 'alternative facts'; Lee McIntyre's
*Respecting Truth: Willful Ignorance in the Internet Age* (2015).
[43] Harris concludes by stating that in Vattimo's view "the internet becomes a place in which one's
representation of the world is put forward for assurance based on one's ego, and the internet duly obliges"
(2015: p.36). Such a view suggests that the sum of digital memory and the connectivity it affords replace
faith narratives by placing validation in the hands of the digital other; a global conscious collective.

aspects of selfhood and the reconstitution of personal narratives through sociotechnological validation. Whilst Harris idea of the return to metaphysics might act to validate the individual, it does so only by means of a passive nihilism. As Woodward notes, rather than draw any form of transparency over society, we in fact see a fragmentation from different narratives. This leads to a distortion that acts against the unified vision of reality. In turn these conflicts of information lead to a *mythic* character "which undermines the understanding of reality as an objective structure to which true statements might correspond, and thus by implication undermines the notion of history as the objective development of this structure" (2009, p.152). As a result, we find ourselves in 'post-history', where technology and capitalism must constantly innovate in order to preserve life. Progress in turn becomes routine because the idea of 'new' loses value within the status quo of capitalism. In order to remain the same there must be a progression: "The more things change, the more things stay the same" (2009: pp.152-153). It is this process that Vattimo identifies as the 'secularisation of the secular', and what Woodward understands as the "secularization of the ideal of progress, which amounts to the end of modernity and the beginning of postmodernity" (Ibid, p.153).

What we see is the fabric of modernity threatening any form of movement beyond. In order to progress truly into the postmodern we would need to recall the structures of the past, despite these very structures (such as unilinear history) being polar to any post-modern developments we may wish for. Even for Vattimo the repetitions of the village atheist appear again at the forefront; a weakness on the part of the human to look beyond existent structures reimagined through capitalism and technology.

*2.4: Woodward's Logic of Difference as a Solution to Nihilism*

Woodward's suggestion is that we tackle nihilism with a 'logic of difference', in following the ideas encountered in Deleuze work on Nietzsche. As he says, it already had a profound impact on the development of French poststructuralism (2009: p.174). Woodward argues that the concept of 'difference' is the enabling factor in the postmodern response to nihilism. [44] The importance of Heidegger's reading of negation factors deeply into many of the interpretations of nihilism since; namely that negation doesn't allow for an overcoming. As Woodward says, it is the "oppositional structure itself that preserves nihilism; it is the *form* of those terms and their relation, rather than the content, that is constitutive of nihilism" (2009: p.175). As Caygill summarises in his own argument:

> Every revaluation of values demands a devaluation or negation of existing values, and this negation prepares the revaluation to serve as a vector for the propagation and survival of nihilism.
>
> (2000: p.196) [45]

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[44] Woodward paints Deleuze as a sore thumb of types in relation to Baudrillard and Vattimo. Neither particularly engage with his work on a level that might be appropriate, in fact there is some rejection of. Baudrillard's 1976 essay, *Forget Foucault* also attacks Deleuze by extension for his prioritising of desire. We might surmise that the same goes for his view of Lyotard, whose *Why Philosophize* takes desire as its starting point for philosophy. However, as Woodward has shown, many of the ideas developed by the postmodern thinkers overlap, so whilst it may be true that approaches differed there are still common grounds in attempts for solution (2009, p.175). They may not agree on the specifics, but there is a general will toward the same outcome.

[45] Caygill also finds issue with Nietzsche's concept of life, "in so far as it evokes determinate biological properties, succumbs to this reinstitution of negation, and hence nihilism" (2000, p.194). In chapter 4 we will

Nietzsche's response of *pure affirmation* is itself problematic on face value; affirmation suggests a duality of sorts, where negation acts as the polar. It also begs the question of how this pure affirmation might be possible. Further, in exploiting value, the hierarchy of values associated with a revaluation of values also propagate nihilism as each revaluation requires the values of old to be shifted to allow a new order (Woodward, 2009: p.176). Woodward opts to draw a path through the logic of negation, linking it to the development of a logic of opposition, where the oppositional relation of terms allow hierarchical organisation to take place which prioritise, or privilege/affirm vs. negate (Woodward, 2009: p.176-177). Woodward looks back to Nietzsche for a solution, returning to the groundwork for the problematic itself. By rereading Nietzsche, and Deleuze' interpretation of his ideas, he finds a type of affinity developed between opposition and negation. For Deleuze, in an opposition "a concept or thing does not negate *all* things that are not in it, but a *particular* thing (its opposite)." (2009: p,177). He points to examples of North and South which are determined not by the negation of other things in general but by the negation of each other. As such, "oppositional force is thus founded on negativity, and this negativity is associated by Deleuze with the devaluation and reactivity of nihilism." (Ibid, p.177). Looking to Deleuze, we see that he understands affirmation and negation as "opposites, but also wholes which exclude their opposite," and the affirmation of this whole is that which exists outside man, yet within ubermensch (Deleuze, 2009: pp.166-167).

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engage with the biological and transhuman implications of life regarding nihilism, as seen in the work of Keith Ansell-Pearson.

A logic of difference is found in part in the postmodern thinkers, but they reject the metaphysics of difference, standing against the belief of an overcoming of nihilism, particularly utilising logic of difference to do so (2009: p. 182). Woodward's understanding of the logic of difference avoids the pitfalls associated with the polar issue of nihilism and its perpetuation via negation.

Woodward's own response is a *politics of passivity.* By employing the logic of difference to the thinking of Baudrillard and Vattimo (also Lyotard), he says "the politics of passivity attempts to negotiate nihilism without hoping to overcome it." (2009: p.187). Much like the postmodern thinkers he engages with, he looks to find an alternative in difference as a non-binary opposition.

As he says, "while the active attempt to overcome *opposes* nihilism the passive politics of affirmative weakness seeks to affirm forces of life that *differ* from nihilism." (Woodward, 2010: p.187). What Woodward envisions isn't an overcoming but a weakening. He sees the postmodern as an attempt to live and survive *within* nihilism.

Whether this might be agreeable in the Nietzschean tradition is problematic. Settling for the status quo might be deemed another extension of the passivity of the village atheist, accepted this time because rigorous thought has been undertaken into the condition of the nihil itself. By confronting nihilism but opting to simply live within it, the value of ubermensch diminishes to little more than fantasy once more. The positive and entirely affirmative cannot operate in a space where the degree of affirmation is dependent on the boundaries imposed on it by the nihilistic playground that postmodernism has envisioned.

Given our attempts to think *trans-Nietzschean*, we find grounds to develop this thinking in greater detail. With the shift in nihilism to a form of heavily politicised and globalised phenomena, we might best understand nihilism as the inescapable in much the same way we do (or don't) with the inevitability of death. The development of the positive and affirmative within enclosed spheres could suggest pockets of micro or situational truths. Rather than the idea of the village atheist as the figure of rejection, thinking *trans-Nietzschean* might suggest an acceptance of the inescapability of nihilism coupled with a rejection of the last man, a near-overriding of Nietzsche, where the suggestion is both to reject escaping nihilism *and* rejecting Nietzsche himself in order to better understand the problem as contemporary.

## 2.5: Chapter Summary & Conclusion

As technology and capitalism have risen, so too have the ways in which philosophy is understood and practiced. We see that for many postmodern thinkers the idea of nihilism is dependent on understanding a complete dissolution in the metanarrative structures that we associate with contemporary times. The turn from interiority to a wider world provides space for new types of philosophy to take place, but if they are to remain true to Nietzsche's nihilism they must be sure to reject repetitions of passivity; understanding the world as building blocks should not imply a reskinned theology (as presented in both capitalism and technology), but grounds for a wider exploration. Because of this we must understand the socio-political aspects of nihilism as a global phenomenon and not just in

the individual. We must also, however, remember the value of thinking *trans-Nietzsche* in order to think *beyond* nihilism as outlined by Nietzsche himself.

Woodward's readings of Baudrillard and Vattimo place a particular emphasis on techno-capitalist structures, so in order to look towards what an ubermensch may be we must next explore capitalism as a form of atheology, a weak nihilism of semiotic simulacra and an analogue for Christianity. We note that the historicity and appropriation of Nietzsche's work are alive and well, with the outlined thinkers, all of whom are influenced by Nietzsche, developing ideas of their own that hint towards a *trans-Nietzschean* understanding.

Despite repetitions of the village atheist's passive nihilism being alive and well in the forms of capitalist consumer culture and faith in the idea of faith (see Vattimo's reflection on the facts of science), developments in technology and science must be factored into the ways in which we account for the nihilism of 'things'. We must therefore better understand technology and its effect on metaphysics. If we are to build ubermensch then we must do so within the climate of tech and enhancement. We find that value is both masked and fluctuating by dictation of semiotic order, and that this leads to a devaluation of life due to the lack of solid foundation to underpin thought. It is therefore of little surprise that consumer culture runs rampant in the contemporary world, acting as a type of instant-fix message of truth that tells us exactly what we need and when we need it, but for the benefit of perpetuating the nihilistic system found within postmodern capitalism.

Whilst Woodward notes that Baudrillard and Vattimo don't believe nihilism is possible to overcome, their approaches to operating within nihilism are still of value, and particularly in Baudrillard we see semblance of progress in the development of our *trans-Nietzschean* argument. Woodward does not see a form of passive nihilism within their work, but a call to take the matter seriously by working within the framework he calls the politics of passivity, rather than attempting to overcome it in what might itself be a metaphysical metanarrative. However, by calling on Deleuze, Woodward's suggestion of a logic of difference providing possibility for overcoming nihilism warrants further exploration.

## CHAPTER 3: THE LAST MAN AND CAPITALISM AS THE NEW (A)THEOLOGY

Having outlined the problem of nihilism in the postmodern age, and its shift from interiority to a type of external and politicised nihilism of semiotics, we now turn our attention to framing capitalism as a repetition of passive nihilism and as a new god for the village atheist. In turn this leads to the rise of a figure deemed the last man, content with the luxuries afforded him by capitalism and passive thought. In this chapter we will understand capitalism as a largely inescapable threat that deeply affects the ways in which we must think about the development of ubermensch, and as the very reason why this last man develops.

In part one we will outline the last man historically, in both Nietzsche's own thought and those of his commentators. Next we turn our attention to framing postmodern capitalism through the world of Goodchild, Fisher and Berardi, charting its development and understanding its all-pervading nature. This allows us to draw parallels with Christianity and shows how capitalism may have impacted on Christian thought itself. Next we turn understanding the inescapable nature of capitalism, understood as a semiocapitalist endeavour, tracing the impact of capitalism and the cyclical nature of debt on both the world and being. We then turn our attention to understanding the impact semiocapitalist nihilism on being itself, understood as the aggravation of negative mental states that trap the thinker and create problems for the growth of possible ubermensch. Finally, we

conclude and understand the need to look to the future and technology for an ubermensch solution that exists *trans*-semiocapitalism.

*3.1: Understanding Nietzsche's Last Man at the End of Postmodernity*

In the days prior to the coming of the ubermensch, Nietzsche predicted the rise of what he termed the ultimate or last man. An apathetic figure driven by luxury and convenience, the last man makes the increasingly small world smaller through his wide-spread existence on the planet (Nietzsche, 2003: p.46). He tells us that as the last man, "none grows rich or poor anymore; both are too much of a burden," and that there is "No herdsman and one herd. Everyone wants the same thing, everyone is the same: whoever thinks otherwise goes to the madhouse (Ibid, p.46). Nietzsche goes on to tell us that the last man is clever and knows everything that has ever happened, and that there is no end to their mockery. They are creatures of pleasure, but of acceptable levels of such. Instead of drowning in intoxication, the last man experiences pleasure with degrees of respect for their own health, and they believe that through the above, they have found happiness (Ibid, p.47). As Zarathustra addresses the crowd, their response is to embrace the last man, telling Nietzsche he can keep the ubermensch (Nietzsche, 2003: p.47).

Kaufmann notes that in his *Meditation* on Schopenhauer, Nietzsche does not find humanity has 'bettered' itself throughout history; there are, to Nietzsche, no artists alive in his time

greater than those in history. [46] There has been no evolution of man through religion, philosophy nor art. As he goes on to say. "The mass of men are essentially animals without any unique dignity, and the "goal of development" cannot therefore, lie "in the mass of specimens of in their well-being, but only "in single great human beings." (Kaufmann, 1974: pp.172-173). These single great human beings are not the last ones in time, but single accidental instances, a point his clarifies with his writing on the last man vs. the ubermensch in *TSZ* (Ibid, p.173). Kaufmann understands this contextually, claiming it "anticipates his later diatribes against utilitarianism" (Ibid, p.173). Safranski notes Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, who applied the idea of uprising to the last man, understood as technology and the mastery of technology acting as the driving factor behind his understanding, driving "man into insurrection", and in turn setting the stage for new understandings of being, the world and nihilism itself (2002: pp.342-343).

For Deleuze, Nietzsche's last man is best understood as "the image in which the reactive man represents himself as 'higher', and, better still, deifies himself. At the same time, the higher man is the image in which the product of culture or species activity appears," (Deleuze, 2009: p.155). The last man is literally *reacting* to what is presented but not challenging the foundation of that which he responds to. His rebuttal is therefore a type of passive nihilism, but with an arrogance and familiarity that languishes self-praise through a form of internal triumph; a type of man who finds pride in possession and wealth. Deleuze

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[46] Cybulska notes Nietzsche's admiration for Wagner (prior to their falling out), and in *The Birth of Tragedy,* he extolled Wagner as heir to Aeschylus and as reviving Greek Tragedy (2015: p.2). Cybulska goes on to suggest that after an incident leading to Nietzsche and Wagner's falling out, Nietzsche began writing *Human, All Too Human,* which began a "struggle with deeply cherished ideals and idols – such as Christianity morality, Schopenhauer, Wagner…" (Ibid, p.3). It is possible, therefore, that Nietzsche *had* found idols in his lifetime, only for his faith to crumble under the strain of reality vs. the historical power of the figure envisioned, stripped of negatives and cast in a favourable light.

notes two forms of the last man in Nietzsche's work, that of the enemy who considers all to mislead Zarathustra, and sometimes as a host or near-companion who is "engaged in enterprise close to that of Zarathustra himself," (Ibid, pp.155-156).

### *3.2 Framing Postmodern Capitalism as a Repetition of the Divine via Goodchild*

Having identified the shift in our understanding of nihilism in the postmodern, and the impact of semiotics and symbols, we must now pay closer attention to the problem of capitalism. In *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety,* Philip Goodchild suggests that piety plays a larger role in our daily lives than we might expect. He defines piety as "the determinate practice of directing attention [by asking] 'what is ultimately worthy of honour, belief, desire, thought, value, trust, enjoyment and worship?" (Goodchild, 2002: p.5). [47] Goodchild's approach casts piety as capitalist endeavour under these limitations, and notes Nietzsche himself draws on this same point in *The Anti-Christ*: Piety is suspected of being self-serving. [48] Essentially, he argues that the form of rationality in reason that has developed from the Greeks onwards "constructs standards of truth, value, interest and power which themselves largely conform to expression of economic exchange" (Ibid, p.94).

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[47] Piety is also understood as a religious devotion/a quality of religiosity, which takes on a quality beyond or outside of time. Calling on Kant, Goodchild notes two types of religion; 'endeavours to win favour' (cult) and moral religions (religions of 'good life-conduct'). In moral religions he finds a disinterest - "they serve ends which are not delimited to a particular individual or group. Sacrificing all claims to religious knowledge, all supernatural security, in 'moral religion' one's salvation depends entirely in the integrity and disinterestedness of one's conduct." (2002: p.3)

[48] Goodchild notes the reference to the book of Matthew, v.46-47, to which Nietzsche responds "Principle of 'Christian love': it wants to be well *paid"* (Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ,* London: Penguin, 1990, p.170).

Goodchild points to a significant restructuring of political and economic structures since the industrial revolution, in the form of the intensification of the global economy, particularly from the 1970's to the 1990's. He notes the key events as follows:

> The abandoning of the gold standard for the dollar in 1971; the deregulation of the world's principal financial markets in London, New York, Tokyo, Frankfurt, and Hong Kong during the 1980s; the introduction of electronic communication technology, allowing the instant transfer of information and money around the world; and the ratification of the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1994. The result is the establishment of Free Trade Zones in countries where trade is otherwise regulated. This free-market lives off its own autonomous processes, which no human institution can control.

> (Goodchild, 2002: p.xi)

Plotting clear and precise instances of the submission of power to forms of the other, Goodchild evidences the shift from degrees of inherent power toward the total nihilism of the now, where both power and value are decided on our behalf by a complex system acting as a repetition of god.

For Berardi, the shift in operation from the industrial to the corporate is a key factor in the dogmatization of capitalism. By sacrificing the education system, health care, transportation and welfare to the above we have lost control of our material legacy (Ibid, p.6). By the 2010's, he says, "the seductive force of simulation transformed physical forms into vanishing images, submitted visual art to spam spreading, and subjected language to

the fake regime of advertising. At the end of this process, real life disappeared into the black hole of financial accumulation" (Berardi, 2015: p.6).

Berardi also points to the death of the hero concept, plotting changes in the concept over time, from classical epic heroes fighting demonic forces of chaos and founding cities, through to elements present in Machiavelli, then the modern political version who establishes infrastructure and industry. At the end of modernity, heroes disappeared - "when the complexity and speed of human events overwhelmed the forces of the will." (Ibid, p.5). Heroism replaced by gigantic machines of simulation. Epic discourse space occupied by "semiocorporations, apparatuses for the emanation of widely shared illusions." (Ibid, p.5). Berardi understands the rise of subcultures (as reactionary forces) as games of Baudrillardian simulation, where the focus has been lost to the voice of the cyclical; rather than an operative intent of change, subcultures become games of simulation by offering the mask of intention, often pacified beyond uniformity and rallying cries. The subculture therefore lacks the intention of its original, instead now little more than a spectacle. However, this is a form of tragedy based upon the mistake of illusion for reality, and the perceived authentication of the identities therein. The problem Berardi identifies is the lack of irony in the situation. He believes that "it is only through irony and conscious understanding of the simulation at the heart of the heroic game, that the simulated hero of subculture still has a chance to save itself." (Ibid, p.5). To be saved from the trappings of simulation under capitalism we must understand not only our intention, but the ridiculousness of our intent and the guise in which we approach our task.

We might question the link between piety and the hero. The hero of history suggests an outpouring of power and goodwill toward others, a concept gradually eroded by the growth

in system actors that provide provisions, but at a cost. No longer does the hero present as selfless or mutually beneficial; under capitalism, the counter-cultural reactionary hero acts only in play. However, if piety has been prevalent in western thought since the ancient Greeks, then history itself conforms to the norms of a type of economics. Even the classical hero of myth is now subject to the same pious processes as the herd, where acts of heroism lose their direct power, instead conforming to a form of economic religiosity. [49] It appears that even history pre-Nietzsche is subject to a form of nihilism that acts beyond the grasp of Christianity. [50]

In the postmodern, however, Goodchild is explicit in his understanding of the death of God as the defining factor of capitalist nihilism (quite viciously, and in line with Nietzsche's own proclamation 'we have killed him, you and I', Goodchild refers to this as the 'murder of god'). Goodchild later poses the following point:

If God is dead, *he is replaced by time and money,* not man - there still are transcendent sources of meaning and value that exceed thought and experience, even if they can take the most banal forms.

(Goodchild, 2002: p.133).

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[49] That Goodchild questions the self-serving circle of piety factors nicely into our new understanding of heroes. He claims the "defenders of piety seek a reward from piety itself", which we might understand as a selfish, if subconscious act (2002: p.4). This raises questions as to whether selfless and heroic acts can or have ever been entirely selfless or heroic at all.

[50] On atheism, Goodchild notes the stemming from refuting of the moral god of Christianity, as if there was no alternative form of God. In his belief, Nietzsche himself remained pious (2002: p.19).

He believes that these figures of transcendence aren't reliant on belief or choice, but instead actively force themselves upon us (Ibid, p.133). The implication of power from an unknown source intensifies the thought: even in rejecting transcendence and the death of God, we are still subject to transcendent forces beyond our control. In fact, he points to God as a surface effect and simulacrum, where time appears to produce effects of "eternal identity, truth and value through repetition" (Ibid, p.2). [51]

He understands the modern world as providing grounds for atheists and theists to live similar lives, through a web of common concepts that structure our lives. Goodchild lists liberty, reason, progress, toleration, wealth, law, contract, right, information, energy, space. "The repetition of such concepts and values in a circular reasoning constitutes the liturgy of common sense: modern thought is maintained by piety" (Ibid, p.2). The rejection of circular reasoning leads to chaos, even logic producing odd effects. He sees the self-regulating market as replacing the social-relations and values of the old god. (Ibid, p.10). This follows on from the creation of paper currency and a state bank. He sees a link with John Locke in the development of ideology of the state as built on ideas of God, right and liberty:

> … they describe participation in the free market, without giving power. Since money accumulates power, it progressively enslaves stakeholders in the market through debt. Usurping God, right and liberty, money becomes a despot.

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[51] The understanding and use of the term simulacra has slightly different implications, particularly amongst French post-structuralist and Continental thinkers. Goodchild references Deleuze throughout his work, so it is probably his understanding aligns with the Deleuzean, expressed as follows: "those systems in which different relates to different *by means of* difference itself. What is essential is that we find in these systems no *prior identity*, no *internal resemblance*" (1994: p.299).

There is a truth in Nietzsche's death of God that links directly to our understanding of the village atheist, and the bad repetitions of passive nihilism. If the repetitions of nihilism and God are found in within capitalism, and the history of Western culture is ingrained in thought, then what does this say of reason?

In reason, Goodchild finds nihilism:

> [Reason] elevates an abstraction to be honoured above the relation that gives rise to it. Disavowing its own piety, forgetting that it always involves its own acts of worship, it attempts to attain a critical, objective stance, apart from religion, by elevating its own very 'natural' idols into concepts that govern its own ways of living and thinking.

(2002: p.95)

Reason therefore becomes a type of sacrifice; on the one hand there is the prioritisation of thought as a result of reason, but at the cost of devaluation of other thought. It is, as he sees it, the root of the 'value of values' - an act of thinking where expenditure is based upon evaluation, where the consideration of how time is best spent is dependent on the problem or situation that needs consideration (Ibid, p.95). The 'exchange' in question (in economic exchange) is devalued by the perceived value of the exchange as the symbolic itself - the act of exchange has higher worth than the intrinsic worth of the exchange. It is not the

exchange of eggs for wool that allow the subjects to survive that is of value, but the fact the exchange is understood as holding value beyond this - it becomes a 'transcendent'. The short-term 'truths' that capitalist nihilism presents are realised in the form of market forces; we literally have to bend reality to fit the system of capital (Ibid, p.48). The last man, with his toys and comforts has no need to question this bending of reality because the system provides a symbolic (and material) wealth that signifies completion and totality through the masking of what lies beyond.

### 3.3.a: Understanding the Inescapability of Nihilism as Semiocapitalism

With the process of capitalism dictating the flow of postmodern culture, the signs and symbols that act as directors need better be understood. Goodchild points to the existence of symbolization preceding the essence of that which is symbolized, and the possibility of consciousness preceding consciousness of the particular. In turn this creates an excess of the signifier at each stage that cannot be attached to the signified (Goodchild, 2002: p.50). As we saw with Woodward, Baudrillard, et al, the idea of overcoming nihilism in the postmodern presents as an exercise of working within its framework to create affirmative methodologies and practices; a type of positive nihilism based upon the acceptance of the inevitable condition, accepting the limitations of both being and nihilism as non-transcendent, but ultimately capable of affirmation to some degree. Again, value enters the equation, but this time the degree is less about quantification or quality of power and value, but rather the trajectory of value from the whole of the polar or binary. If the quanta and quality of signified power outweighs the degree of excess of the signifier, then capitalistic nihilism might provide grounds for a form of escape. However, as we shall see, the

trappings of capitalism and the repetitions of nihilism found within make the task
problematic and difficult at best.

In the opening of his recent book, *Heroes,* Franco Berardi informs us that he was inspired
to write this book after the learning of the Aurora massacre, otherwise known as the
Batman killings. [52] In such an act, Berardi found the "breaking of separation between
spectacle and the real," (Berardi, 2015: p.1). Berardi questions whether the world (and its
becoming) could be better understood through the lens of "this kind of horrible madness,
rather than through the polite madness of economists and politicians" (Ibid, p.2). For
Berardi the quest isn't to understand through standardized theory or structured debate, but
rather through the anxieties and internal drives of the individuals who commit the acts. As
such, he describes the subject of the book as "the establishment of a kingdom of nihilism
and the suicidal drive that is permeating contemporary culture, together with a
phenomenology of panic, aggression and resultant violence" (Ibid, p.2). The focus is not to
be on serial killers, therefore, but those suffering who become criminals to "express their
psychopathic need for publicity and also to find a suicidal exit from their present hell"
(Ibid, p.3). Berardi's approach turns the system on itself in an attempt to understand the
interior effects of the system on the participant, and in turn the violent outward result. The
result, this form of nihilistic, all-consuming capitalism, is one he dubs
'semiocapitalism'. He describes semiocapitalism thus:

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[52] July 20th, 2012, 16 movie goers attending a screening of *The Dark Knight Rises* were shot by assailant,
James Eagan Holmes, in Aurora, Colorado. Initially, many movie-goers thought Holmes was wearing a
costume (as many other attendees were), imagining it to be a publicity stunt on the part of the studio or
theatre. Ten victims died at the scene, with two more dying later in hospital. (Berardi, 2015: pp.1-2).

> The sublimation of reality to the simulacra… the contemporary regime of
> production in which capital valorization is based on the constant emanation of
> information flows.

<div align="right">(Ibid, p.24)</div>

Under semiocapitalism, information itself becomes a form of capital (as does misinformation). Data, whether as function or currency replaces the material (fuel and food), so value becomes increasingly more abstracted.

Factoring in Goodchild's understanding of the semiotic language of postmodern capitalist nihilism, where the social domain accounts for what can be communicated or symbolized (and the encompassing totality of the thinkable), then the sum of that which can be signified by as outweighed by that which is signified points to the alarming results that Berardi interrogates. If the last man is truly content, then the figure who sees through the mask of semiocapitalism (or alternately, fails to grasp the implications of semiocapitalism) will understandably struggle to see an alternative, particularly if history already aligns reason with piety. Passive nihilism might therefore not be a matter of laziness or unsound thinking on the part of the participant, but an anxiety propagated by the perceived inescapability of the semiocapitalist system.

For Mark Fisher, the inescapable perceptions of capitalism produce an effect he refers to as capitalist realism, the sense that there is no sense of an alternative to capitalism as a viable political and economic system, capturing the anxieties and impossibilities of imagining

alternatives. He calls on work by Jameson and Zizek to note this, stating that for most of us, "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism (2008: p.2). Much like Berardi, Fisher understands the anxieties of living within capitalism, and he understands that these anxieties need to be understood culturally (Ibid, p.3). He sees these anxieties largely resulting in a bi-polar oscillation:

> The 'weak messianic' hope that there must be something new on the way lapses into the morose conviction that nothing new can ever happen. The focus shifts from the Next Big Thing to the last big thing - how long ago did it happen and just how big was it?

> (Ibid, p.3)

In arguing the concept of capitalist realism, Fisher recalls Baudrillardian concepts of 'systems of equivalence', "which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography or *Das Kapital,* a monetary value," where beliefs of past cultures are "'objectively ironized, transformed into *artefacts.* Capitalist realism is therefore not a particular type of realism; it is more like realism itself" (Ibid, pp.3-4). What results is the hyperreality of postmodernity, but rather than a strict system of semiotics, Fisher pushes for an understanding of capitalist realism being all-consuming. This understanding has similar implications to those of Berardi: theology repeats itself, but after the death of God theology is reborn as a godless entity. Capitalism takes the rituals and practices of religious systems but reimagines them in infinitely less tangible but more direct ways (as they impact on us *now*). For the last man, this endless hopelessness is reason enough for us to understand the malaise and futility of postmodern living. As he

goes on to say, "Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator" (2008: pp.4-5). This consumer-spectator relationship can be understood as the cyclical response as highlighted in Baudrillard's *Hypermarkets,* understood as the *want* of consumption dictating interpretations of need, and abstracted forms of capital (the object of consumption, the monetary and/or emotional investment and trade), but capitalist realism presents itself as a shield against older orders and indeed against alternatives (in that it poses examples of lesser economically developed countries in its reasoning) (2008, p.4) What this leads to is a "desacralization of culture," that is a system no longer governed by transcendental law, but rather codes of practice that are pieced together on an ad-hoc basis. It can perpetually be recoded and rewritten based on the need and context (Ibid, p.6). In the consumer cycle as described in Baudrillard's *Hypermarkets* essay, then supply creates demand and the things we crave are not needs (and even the needs are wants to an extent - we have choice). The cycle becomes not about the exchange of goods, materials or necessary abstracted value (protection, the promise of a hand in marriage), but an eternal base value in flux, which as a self-referential object must always take a value of nil. In a rhizomic system where value is *always* subjective information always gives rise to the source, and unique identifiers such as scarcity act in play with this; this clay vase will not be used to house flowers and water, but instead to stand in the corner of the room; these plates are for display only. We never eat off them.

Under semiocapitalism there is only one rule to drive all others, and that is competition. The idea of competition driving all else may have a Nietzschean feel to it, and indeed it might even be the kind of last man Deleuze refers to when he mentions the type that can be

companion to Zarathustra, but competition comes with its own cost. Berardi describes debt as "a sort of metaphysical curse...", giving the example of students, where finance becomes debt, in turn becoming guilt and a form of submission (2015: p.27). We have to buy in to our own future, but to secure it requires us to trade freedom; it is a literal form of self-enslavement.

Recalling Deleuze work on Nietzsche, he finds within the death of god an intrinsic link between debt and fate. He says the following:

> Christ is said to have died for our *sins!* The creditor is said to have given his own son, to have repaid himself with his own son, so immense was the debtors debt. The father no longer kills his own son to make him independent, but *for us,* because of us.

> (Deleuze, 2009: p.145)

Understood in Deleuzean terms, the idea of God (the creditor) allowing sin (debt) to exist within humanity creates a cycle of endless rebuttals, always falling short and refuted for this. He also notes (on the subject of culture) that "the relationship between men is determined, following the equation, as a *relationship of a creditor and debtor:* justice makes man *responsible for debt"* (Ibid, p.126). He sees this as a crude and basic function that can be traced back prior to pre-history. If we understand it as such, the development of the human relation to God is equal or equivalent to that of the basic human-human. As we have seen previously, Baudrillard would understand the act of exchange and giving in pre-capitalist societies as times where content and material had intrinsic value, yet in this

Deleuze finds what may be the seed of our undoing for Nietzsche: the cycle of debt that births our understanding of the Christian God as humanity develops. This same development in postmodernity is one smart enough to override the failings of faith to science and reason and place the theological *inside* capital. Both faith and reality are subject to a type of finance capital exchange where the cyclical nature of debt can never be repaid. [53]

As Berardi notes, "Financial capitalism seems to be driven by a form of nihilism," and as such, the idea of capital, debt and value ring clearer as theological instruments of the nihil (2015: p.86). He identifies the change as a shift from "constructive, hermeneutic nihilism" to a form of "annihilating nihilism" that actively produces *nihil* as it's effect (Ibid, p.88). He goes on to say "Annihilating nihilism is a peculiar phenomenon - the product of financial capitalism. In the sphere of financial capitalism, destroying concrete wealth is the easiest way to accumulate abstract value" (Ibid, p.88).

Berardi uses the example of the credit default swap (CDS), a form of contract where the buyer of the CDS pays the seller and in exchange receives a form of pay-off "if an instrument - typically a bond or loan - goes into default (fails to pay)" (Ibid, pp.88-89). This can also (somewhat less commonly) include the restructuring or bankruptcy of a company, or the downgrading of a credit rating. If the above is done on the understanding that the value of money increases as things are annihilated, jobs, companies, cities, then

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[53] See also Zizek's (2014: pp.42-45) belief that the shrinkage of salaries and removal of social provision is compensated by the current socio-political conditions reliance on consumer credit and the erosion of rights; that people no longer have a *right* to housing, higher education, etc, without the reliance of a loan and systems of debt. This in turn leads to a sense of responsibility as citizens for the country's debt and the reliance on the neoliberal system to sustain the perceived advantages of the 'luxuries' we have been afforded.

financial profiteering of this kind is "essentially constructed upon a bet on the degradation of the world" (Ibid, p.89). It is a neoliberal, 'winner on top' form of competition, a savvy form of crime with suicide (i.e. the abandon killing of the structures of the global-self) at its core. [54] He notes that under industrial capitalism, "profits increased when citizens acquired enough money to buy the goods that were produced in factories. In the sphere of financial capitalism, financial indicators go up only if social welfare crumbles and salaries fall" (Ibid, p.92).

### 3.3.b: Understanding the Inescapable Nature of Nihilism as Presented in Fisher's Capitalist Realism

Fisher identifies a futility with the term postmodern; it's hugely contested, with multiple multi-faceted nuanced meanings that are ever-shifting. Moreso, those terms that did have a degree of stability have become aggravated and undergone change (Fisher, 2008: p.7), like Berardi he identifies the beginning of a new *post*-postmodern. Based upon understanding the trouble with applying the term postmodernity, Fisher defines capitalist realism as follows:

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[54] The Routledge published *For Business Ethics* by Jones, Parker and Ten Bos definite neoliberalism: "Neoliberalism represents a set of ideas that caught on from the mid to late 1970s, and are famously associated with the economic policies introduced by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States following their elections in 1979 and 1981. The 'neo' part of neoliberalism indicates that there is something new about it, suggesting that it is an updated version of older ideas about 'liberal economics' which has long argued that markets should be free from intervention by the state. In its simplest version, it reads: markets good, government bad" (2005: p.100).

1. In the 1980s when Jameson wrote, there were still (in name at least), political alternatives to capitalism (in Britain he sees the decline of socialism, the power of unions, and the demise of mining under bleak Thatcherism as a key event)

2. Postmodernism involved a relationship to modernism - now (as capitalist realism) modernism can now return periodically, "but only as a frozen aesthetic style, never as an ideal for living"

3. Post-fall of the Berlin Wall, capitalism has now absorbed any form of outside. Young people have never seen anything *but*.

(Ibid, pp.7-8)

What is more, under capitalist realism, capitalism is widely disseminated. Identifying examples by Zizek, he notes the "Hollywood villains as 'evil corporations", but Fisher sees this as feeding capitalist realism rather than challenging it (Ibid, p.12). He calls on Zizek's idea of "overvaluing belief" - the inner subjective attitude- "at the extent of the beliefs we exhibit and externalize in our behaviour" (Ibid, p.12). We talk about the meaninglessness of money, but *act* as if it has [in fishers words] "Holy value". Fisher cites Live Aid as such an example. He first notes that it is a kind of repetition of the protest movement of the 1960's, but is now part of the system that previous protests fought against. It is now the product of the opposition branded as counter-cultural in spirit but operating comfortably within the confines of acceptance that there is no alternative to capitalism. The fantasy, Fisher tells us, "being that western consumerism, far from being intrinsically implicated in systemic global inequalities, could itself solve them. All we have to do is buy the right products" (Ibid, p.15).

If the grip of religion is gradually slipping over the course of postmodernity, then it appears faith is only growing. The abstraction of faith from religion means that it is applied in new ways: branded, easily accessible and colourfully packaged for easy consumption. Even essential services of social order such as education and healthcare are now run like businesses. What was previously an aspect of the division between work and social (how healthcare and education are a necessity) are now ingrained within the cycles and flows of capitalism (2008: p.16). Capitalist realism relies on fantasy structures; climate change and the threat of resource depletion are no longer repressed but incorporated into advertising and marketing. These catastrophes become part of this system and in turn are folded back on themselves, much like countercultural movements mentioned above. Instead of a major concern they become causes championed by corporations, things they are tackling and will beat through the illusion of unlimited resources and a sheddable earth. Ibid, p.18) But as Fisher goes on to point out, "the relationship between capitalism and eco-disaster is neither coincidental nor accidental: capital's 'need of a constantly expanding market', its 'growth fetish' means that capitalism is by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability (Ibid, pp.18-19).

Goodchild notes that the essence of capital's power is due to it being *external* to the ecological order of nature and the social order of labour, "where a market is predicated on exchange between equals, there is no commensurability between land, labour and capital" (2002: p.36). As a result, finance capital has forcibly overtaken rights, liberty and piety. It exerts a type of control seen in fixed prices and labour assignment (Ibid, p.36). If capitalism exists *beyond* the ecological order, then the link between its abstraction and the direct impact on the earth loses urgency. If the semiotic order suggests that we are subject

to an ecological crisis, but the signs in place do little to factor the link between the abstraction of capitalism and the ecological, then it is no surprise either subject is rejected. The perception for the last man is capital acting as an accumulation of wealth, of the realisation of heaven on earth vs. the outdated idea of hard work, suffering and toil in exchange for eternal life.

### 3.4 The Condition of the Last Man and the Dissolution of Self Through Semiocapitalism

Despite the abstract nature of capital, there are arguably noticeable and direct impacts on those living within the system. Fisher notes the growth of mental health problems under capitalism, mapping out an argument for mental conditions to be viewed as political categories. (Fisher, 2008: p.19) Recalling work by Oliver James in his book *The Selfish Capitalist,* Fisher argues that the neoliberal mode of capitalism practiced in countries like Britain and the USA, need reframing. Depression is the most treated condition by the NHS, but rather than understand it as a global problem attached to capitalist culture and anxieties, we instead look at the individual. We understand it in terms of the illnesses of individuals, in turn letting people (increasingly large amounts of young people) deal with the situation through treatment rather than addressing the root of the problem (2008: p.19). [55] This, for Fisher, is concrete evidence of the dysfunctional nature of capitalism, and the cost for capitalism to work is very high. He also notes bureaucracy as the other major phenomenon of his focus. Top-down bureaucracy, he notes, was supposed to have been made obsolete under neoliberalism; viewed as Stalinist and inefficient. Instead it has

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[55] Similar claims have been made by psychologist David Smail, whose *The Origins of Unhappiness* argues that emotional and psychological distress often finds origin in the social and environmental powers that lie beyond our direct experiences.

decentralized into fractured forms lacking clear cohesion between models within its structure (Ibid, p.19). This in turn evidences that capitalism operates in ways much different to those indicated by capitalist realism.

As anthropological evolution, contemporary capitalism is understood by Berardi as "the turning point beyond the age of Humanism" (2015: p.89). Semiocapitalism has taken the place of industrial capitalism. Berardi further identifies Semiocapitalism as a definition for the current global economic system; the political aspect of transformation stemming from neoliberal deregulation he calls capitalist absolutism. It becomes a type of death drive, pushing towards suicide by corporations and power bodies, both of which ignore the global catastrophic risk (ecological crises, the threat of nuclear war) as if its existence is enough to invalidate all-else. The omnipresent financial clutch of capitalism claims a mantle of omnipotency; in ignoring or rejecting greater issues of existential risk (or by corporations 'doing their bit'), risk becomes devalued and removed from the shared hallucination of reality. What we are left with is a system of absolute capitalism "in which the only effective principles are those of value-accumulation, profit-growth and economic competition. These are all-encompassing priorities, and the over-whelming impetus at its core," (Ibid, p.91).

For Berardi, this is obliterating the humanist tradition (which was based on the idea that human destiny is not subjected to any theological law or necessity), but this accumulation of wealth becomes theological not because it regulates through force, but because it abstracts what was quantifiable and makes the accumulation of the abstract form of power (i.e. wealth, value) the driving force. He also notes that rather than creating a cyber-utopia,

the dawn of mainstream internet culture has instead led to greater alienation, and the global

connection for categorisation based on interest and belief becomes stronger; a town

containing a singular custard cream fanatic can now interact with other one-fan towns

(Ibid, pp.116-118). Alienation no longer wears a mask of the outcast or loner; the outcast

and loner are now unified and able to call exclusivity to their club, with information only

accessible to the esoterist with similar interest. Perhaps the same esoterist that would be of

a disposition to read the work of Nietzsche himself. When we couple this with the

widespread of untapped raw (and deeply edited/spun) information, it is hard to know where

to draw the line or search for facts, hence a tendency for people to 'read what they know'. [56]

The information that bends the world in favour of a safe form of thinking that aligns with

the safest subjective belief of least anxiety.

Berardi identifies a theory of desensitization that leads to a pathology of empathy,

"precariousness as fragmentation of the social body, self-perception and time," (Ibid, p.49).

The development of technology has birthed the first generation where children are learning

more from machines than their parents. He sees a "disassociation of language learning

from the bodily affective experience; the second is the virtualization of the experience of

the other" (Ibid, p.48). The removal of face-to-face interaction leads to a type of alienation

based on interactions that amount to less than human; the nurturing associated with growth

replaced by machines and software. [57] Despite this, or perhaps *because* of this, validation

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[56] In *Respecting Truth* Lee McIntyre outlines the psychological phenomena of 'confirmation bias', where we literally "seek out information that confirms our preconceptions," and 'hindsight bias', "where we rely on current knowledge to assume that something was predictable all-along", espousing both as common-place phenomena (2015: pp.11-15).
[57] A 2010 study on addictive behaviour and depression in online gaming by the Department of Clinical, Biological and Differentiated Psychology at the University of Vienna indicated that many players of MMORPG's (Massively Multiple Online Roleplay Games) such as World of Warcraft were more likely to present with problematic gaming behaviour, depression and low self-esteem. Many pointed to real-life problems as a motivator to find a form of escapism (*Computers in Human Behavior 27,* 2011: pp.473-479).

appears to be sought through new forms of media and technology: Facebook, YouTube,

reality television and the drive for fame. He questions whether serial murder and public

atrocity is a form of this – he points to one example of Klebold and Harris, the Columbine

murderers, arguing over who would direct the movie of the massacre. For many of the

mass-murderers outlined in his book there is an over-arching need for validation, mostly

voiced in the form of manifestos found posthumously. The mass-murderer, it would seem,

often believes in a form of social-Darwinism where they see themselves as smarter than

those that have marginalized them, viewing themselves as an outsider from society (Ibid

pp.34-35). Their actions are more than a cry for help, they are the culmination of the event

of being, often understood as some last-ditch effort to overcome all there is by exacting

revenge on the 'stronger' beings that drove them to alter the balance of power they

understand themselves within. The irony is, of course, that this form of social Darwinism

itself is a form of passive nihilism and an embrace of the pseudo-religious - worshipping at

an altar of the (most probably) powerful white male, of which the adherent may believe of

themselves or understand as an attainable reality.


In understanding the actions of mass-murders like Klebold and Harris, Berardi identifies

"psychology as a suicidal form of the neoliberal will to win" (2015, p.51) There are, we are

told, only winners and losers. The mass murderer knows he is not the strongest or smartest.

so he opts to retaliate in the most futile way - death and destruction of others and then

himself. There is nowhere for him to go after that. Diagnosed as suffering from

Alexithymia - an inability to recognise one's own feelings and emotions, he would spend

up to 16 hours per day playing online games such as World of Warcraft (partly as a form of

raising propaganda through avatars). Berardi believes "extended exposure to the virtual

flow is one of the most important causes of the current psycho-cognitive mutation." But also that psychic suffering (loneliness, angst, depression) precedes any such circumstantial factors (Ibid, p.116). Is this loneliness part of the condition of the last man?

Unlike Breivik, who felt feminized by the lack of dominant and disciplining male figure in his life (which in turn led to the savage murder of over 70 people as an act of political terrorism), Nietzsche felt let down by the dominant male figures. [58] Rather than call for a societal link between the two in a political sense, like Anders, Nietzsche instead folds this thought into a form of intra-political thinking - One must become the hardened shell of oneself in order to create and maintain a form of patriarchal figure that is infallible and invulnerable to external threat (but not external stimuli - for an ubermensch must always be thinking and considering). [59] The desocialization of both men acts to make their interacting with others difficult; Nietzsche's own struggles to make what he considers true friends are reflected in Zarathustra's realisation that his followers will never be ubermensch, yet he drinks, eats and rejoices with them anyway (Nietzsche, 2003: pp.322-334). However, under Berardi's vision of semiocapitalism, the true cost is not announced in any visible or tangible sense, rather it is as abstract as semiocapitalism itself.

Berardi believes that the true cost of life under semiocapitalism is the exploitation of neural energy. As he goes on to say -

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[58] See Cybulska's (2015) *Nietzsche's Ubermensch: A Glance Behind the Mask of Hardness* for further reading on Nietzsche and his soured relationship with male figures and role models.
[59] In *Untimely Meditations* Nietzsche uses both 'femninization' and 'infantization' as negative traits in relation to the development of simplified understandings of science for the general public (1997, p.99)

> Attention is under siege, both in the space of production and that of consumption. Attention implies a constant investment of nervous energy, and this is much more difficult to manage and is much more unpredictable than the muscular effort of workers on the assembly line

(Berardi, 2015: p.138)

The idea of the last man as content with materials and trinkets, living a self-obsessed lifestyle where one is held in high self-regard whilst succumbing to a slow yet inevitable death is best understood when we view it in light of this. Studies by Microsoft on human attention span in the digital age have shown a reduction of around 4 seconds over the course of thirteen years, from 12 seconds in 2009 to 8 in 2013 (Ibid, p.6). With attention spans reducing and our adoption of a technologically induced multi-functional approach to living, the concept of the last man increasingly probable. Even if we are to take Nietzsche's words with a pinch of salt, there is evidence to suggest that technology is drastically altering our behaviour. The resulting impact of capitalism and technology on our being, we are told by Berardi, is what he terms bio-semiocapitalism. It is recognised through the erosion of sleep (and our attempts to combat it through drugs, stimulants and scientific experimentation) and the increase in suicide as the result of inescapable worldly anxiety (Berardi, 2015: pp.164-165). As the workplace increasingly places demand on our attention in new ways (working from home, working late, meetings out of hours), solidarity among workers is eroded through the emphasis on competition. The forcing of workers to compete in a 'meritocracy', based upon skill sets and competencies, pits each worker against the next. The strategy of the company, Berardi tells us, "is to make people so stressed that they lose every autonomy, any sense of solidarity, thus becoming totally

dependent on the automatisms of exploitation" (Ibid, p.171). If we are to agree with Berardi, then between the rise in the technological urgency to operate on multiple levels at any given time and the semiocaptalistic emphasis on absorbing all being into a grand unifying mechanism, there is a definite theology to semiocapitalism (it is the only answer and way), and the last man has welcomed it through seeing no other alternative. Instead, he just wallows in the illusion of meaning through conditioning and distraction.

**3.5:** *Berardi and Fisher's Responses to Semiocapitalism and Capitalist Realism*

If we are to combat the effects of semiocapitalism, then for Berardi we must do so by embracing an increased research and understanding of neuro-plasticity in order to understand brain activity whilst "wiring of the collective brain will be the main task of technology," whilst choosing between a form of "'ultimate neuro-totalitarianism or a new form of trans-human Humanism" (2016: pp.204-205). In order to overcome semiocapitalism, Berardi's suggestion is embracing the change capitalism and technology have afforded us and turning it back on itself. If we are to understand this in Nietzschean terms, then we must ask whether transhumanism would be our solution to the nihilism (and the birth of the ubermensch), or whether it would simply be another case of Berardi's counter-cultural heroes acting without a shred of irony.

Fisher (2008, p.20) stresses many of the same concerns, but opts for a more prevalent case study. Whereas Berardi chose to focus on the effects of capitalism on mental health (and the alienation and anxiety that birth the mass-murderer), Fisher's focus is in part on the mental health of the young. He refers to the phrase 'reflexive importance' - knowing

something is bad but being unable to do anything about it [young people]. Young people

are increasingly ill and damaged by mental health problems, but problems are privatized;

classed as chemical imbalances or familial/personal background problems. Social systemic

causes are ruled out (Ibid, p.21). He tells us "to be bored simply means to be removed from

the communicative sensation-stimulus matrix of texting, YouTube and fast food; to be

denied, for a moment, the constant flow of sugary gratification on demand" (Ibid, p.24). [60]

The desire is for easily consumable, quick-fix solutions to problems; information bitesize

form ready to be digested as bullet-point factoid, even for that which it does not apply

(dense technical content, etc). There is a cycle of debt at work that is larger than that of the

merely educational: with few options available to the young, continuing in the educational

system provides stability for longer; the option of a poorly paid job with little room for

progression can be ignored for greater time by remaining in education; should the person

continue on to study beyond this the job of course never goes away, but the debt accrued

increases. There is capital attached to education in the form of student loans, but also to the

'value' of being educated, even when the reality is that for many graduates there is little to

differentiate their societal value from that of their sixteen year old counterpart. Jobs that as

little as ten years ago were available for school and college leavers now require a degree

even for consideration. The bar has been raised in terms of personal expectation the part of

the worker, yet the rewards are the same (if not lower). (Ibid, p,26). Fisher relates this to

Deleuze concept of Control societies (those based on debt rather than enclosure), but as

Fisher points out, the current educational system both indebts *and* encloses students (Ibid,

p.26). As we can see, this cycle of debt is much the same as that identified by Berardi

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[60] French philosopher of science, Michel Serres' essay on youth, culture and technology, *Thumbelina,* points to both the prevalence of advertising in the lives of millennial youth alongside the stimulation of different sets of neurons via the digital vs. face-to-face interactions (2015: pp.5-8).

earlier, and falls in line with both Deleuzean and Nietzschean interpretations of debt as a motor for faith.

Where Fisher differs from Berardi is his attempt to understand the positives of capitalism as espoused by neoliberalism. Where neoliberalism might embrace capitalism to push for a logical conclusion to the system (and indeed, perhaps Land is still attempting to invoke the apocalypse from his beyond his days as a prophet of cybernihilist doom), Fisher sees simply repetition. He notes that Badiou and Harvey argue that neoliberal politics are not about pushing for a new but instead a 'restoration'. They are a *return* of class power and privilege (Ibid, pp.28-29), for this reason Harvey defines neoliberalism *now* as "a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (Ibid p.29). Recalling work by McCauley (and later Sennett), Fisher points to the new requirements under decentralization; workers no longer acquire a skillset that enables them to progress through an institutional hierarchy, rather they must now reskill and move laterally. Flexibility becomes the new premium for workers (Ibid, pp.30-32). In turn this leads to an intermingling of work and life, ingraining capital in every activity. The linearity of time is broken and nervous systems are restructured along with production and distribution. We increasingly work from home or hold digital conferences across international borders, working in the hours we should be sleeping, dreaming in office lingo, business acronyms and the relentless siren of telephones. Work becomes a spectre that haunts our sleep.

What is perhaps most important to note in Fisher's argument is his synthesis of capitalism and mental health as a predicate. He uses work by Deleuze and Guattari and Marazzi to

explore this, and states "schizophrenia is the condition marking the outer edges of capitalism, then bi-polar disorder is the mental illness proper to the 'interior' of capitalism" (Ibid, p.31). A form of capitalism is present that enforces ideas of material affluence (something we can all achieve in fantasy) as the key to winning and gaining fulfilment, available to anyone who works hard enough (Ibid, p.36). An inability to achieve feeds into a sense of failure and worthlessness based on a false presumption, but one that we are increasingly (and openly) aware of, only we believe in no alternative. We have, as passive nihilists, committed ourselves to our only hope being that we know there is no movement. Instead we take comfort in that knowing, albeit a sick kind of comfort that leads to the malaise and angst that often prefigure psychological events that impact on our well-being. The cycle of debt deepens because we can never achieve but can only keep trying. [61]

The last man is a microscopic looping in an even denser landscape than before. Time accelerates with the advent of new technologies, we become increasingly self-aware of our trappings, and looping intensifies. Even our attempts to cure our ailments and anxieties are met with the capitalist response of pharmaceuticals, self-help guides and signifiers that order us to deepen our commitment to the cycle - we can only be redeemed by strengthening our bond with the only form of other we are offered.

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[61] In 2000, former Consultant Psychologist and Nietzsche scholar Dr, Eva Cybulska published a paper in the journal *Hospital Medicine* that provided ground-breaking insight in Nietzschean scholarship. Shifting an emphasis from Nietzsche's psychosis and eventual demise being a side-effect of syphilis, Cybulska proposed that Friedrich Nietzsche suffered from a condition far better understood today – bipolar affective disorder. It was a bold claim based on years of experience within the health industry, and one that makes sense in light of his own confessional writings and diaries. (Cybulska, 2000). It is due to this study and the impact that we emphasise the need to understand Nietzsche historically and contextually.

Fisher's conclusion is that in order to move beyond capitalism we must embrace the thinking of the left. He believes that the key to escaping capitalist realism is a reorganisation of the state to the general will, which requires us "resuscitating the very concept of a general will, reviving - and modernizing - the idea of a public space that is not reducible to an aggregation of individuals and their interests" (Ibid, p.77). In order to combat capitalist realism we must, much like Berardi, turn the system back on itself be embracing a new form of valuation that stems from capitalism itself.

### 3.6: Chapter Summary & Conclusion

As a contented figure under capitalism, the last man is perhaps the ultimate repetition of the village atheist, reacting with ignorance and gluttony and finding pleasures in a post-theological society. With a shift in the way we perceive nihilism we have also discovered movement in the way we must perceive the world. Much like nihilism, capitalism has seeped into the cracks and fabric of the socio-political sphere in ways previously reserved for God, particularly as evidenced by Goodchild. With the global structure of capitalism acting as a repetition of theology, we find ourselves in what Nietzsche would deem an impasse. The repetitions of passive nihilism at work in contemporary society lead to a kind of mutant nihilism where the intentions of theology and of ultimate questions and answers are replaced by a system of capital and consumption. Our understanding of nihilism, as (bio/techno)semiocapitalism, finds value only in the concepts of credit and the amassing of symbolic wealth, and the idea of salvation is lost in favour of the development of the here and now.

Understanding the last man in both semiocapitalism and capitalist realism, however, opens further avenues of exploration, and should we embrace the political aspects of both Fisher and Berardi, we have grounds to formulate ideas of what an ubermensch could be. The most problematic area that arises is the literal historicity of capital as ingrained in thought, and when we factor this alongside the despair and anxiety evidenced in our argument, we can understand that the literal barrage of (mis)information and the separation of thought, capital and ecology from an understanding of truth (where truth acts as shifting and short-term solutions that benefit capital), acknowledging the capacity for the last man, or indeed humans, to find grounds for escaping nihilism is problematic.

In order to become ubermensch and to possess the qualities of the active nihilist needed to do so, we must also embrace Nietzsche's belief in an (un)natural order of things, a hierarchy that is less than present in the socialist and communist leanings of Fisher and Berardi. If the inescapability of capitalism is itself the biggest threat for ubermensch, then we must realise ubermensch as a post-political figure, a figure envisioned as *trans-Nietzschean*. In order to do so we will now consider the concept of ubermensch as something to be situated *outside* the embrace of capitalism, by thinking *beyond* the Nietzschean. As capitalism offers a kind of false-identity and another form of theology that is now inherent in our very being, in order to escape it we must think outside the box. We will do this by speculating on Berardi's suggestion of the embrace of the transhuman in the final chapter.

# CHAPTER 4: AN INTERROGATION OF UBERMENSCH AS THE TRANSHUMAN AND ARTICIAL INTELLIGENCE

If the inescapable nature of nihilistic repetition found in capitalism stunts all progress, then we must return to the idea of thinking *trans-Nietzsche* in order to solve our problem. If ubermensch is to be realised within our 200 year timeframe, then we must reimagine ubermensch as something truly *beyond,* as being capable of operating external to the demands of the enveloping bio-semiocapitalism. In this chapter we will untangle the threads of the ubermensch and transhumanism argument, showing that whilst transhumanism and ubermensch is incompatible, ubermensch as superintelligent AI is not. We first look at the transhuman condition as understood in the present. Taking cues from Keith Ansell-Pearson, we will show that links between the transhuman ideal and ubermensch viewed by key Nietzschean scholars such as Sorgner and Loeb are disparate at best, and that if we are to reach a new contemporary understanding of how ubermensch could be realised, we must reject ideas of the transhuman as ubermensch. This is however not to say we should reject ideas of the transhuman *itself.* Next we will explore idea of ubermensch by casting an eye towards primary drives, interrogating both the will to power and the eternal return, concepts that have fallen out of favour with Nietzschean scholars particularly where ubermensch is concerned, but which Nietzsche claims central to the development of ubermensch. Here we engage with Nietzsche's primary drives for ubermensch rather than merely ruminating on the possible end results. We then filter this through Kroker's understanding of the will to technology. Finally, we will turn to the concept of AI superintelligence, as outlined by Nick Bostrom, and show that a potential superintelligence could account for a valid and realistic envisioning of ubermensch in

contemporary times via the ability to find difference in repetition through AI's proposed abilities of advanced problem solving, crystalline information storage and a willing based entirely on a mode of digital thought exterior to the nihilism of semiocapitalism.

## *4.1: Interrogating the Roots of Transhumanism and the Links to Nietzsche*

We now understand the western world as one strangled by capitalism, and as undeniably difficult to escape. If we are to find a way to develop ubermensch at the end of Nietzsche's proposed 200 years of nihilism then we must proceed carefully. Through our readings of Berardi's call for transhuman consideration and the postmodern thinker's engagement with technology, we understand the need to interrogate the human connection to technology. In recent years the astronomical growth in technological capability has impacted on the ways we think about the future. Ideas previously reserved for science fiction and wishful thinking are now a reality; from space flight to pocket computers to the equally controversial Orwellian surveillance state. We can in no small way attribute some of these developments to fantastical concepts of the past, and it looks ever more likely that technological speculation will open more minds to ideas that might one day become reality. Developments in the recently established field of transhumanism are at the forefront of technological conversations, with the possibilities of life extension and brain expansion being hotly debated topics in both the private and public spheres. [62] Debates on

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[62] For religious studies and transhumanism see C. Mercer & T. Trothen (eds.) *Religion and Transhumanism: The Unknown Future of Human Enchancement;* R. Cole-Turner (ed.) *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enchancement* (2011, Georgetown University Press; USA). G.R. Hansell & W. Grassie (eds.) *H+/- Transhumanism and Its Critics* provides both arguments for and against embracing transhumanism from philosophers, biologists, futurists, academics and psychologists. See also M. More & N. Vita-More (eds.) *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology and Philosophy of the future;* H. Tirosh-Samuelson & K.L. Mossman (eds.) *Building Better*

transhumanism have also filtered into Nietzschean philosophy, with some comparing ubermensch to the transhumanist ideal.

Nick Bostrom, a transhumanist philosopher and Director of both the Future of Humanity Institute and the Strategic Artificial Intelligence Research Centre, defines transhumanism thus:

> Transhumanism is a loosely defined movement that has developed gradually over the past two decades. It promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology.

> (Bostrom, 2005: p3) [63]

In recent years theories of evolution and the transhuman have converged, with claims that the next logical evolutionary step is the development of technology as an inevitable and vital and intrinsic of human growth. Some thinkers such as Stefan Lorenz Sorgner have linked the idea of the transhuman with the development of the Nietzschean ubermensch,

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*Humans? Refocussing the Debate on Transhumanism* for further priming from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary discussion. In politics, American journalist and transhumanist, Zoltan Istvan ran for U.S. President with his own Transhumanist Party in order to raise awareness of the transhumanist movement. The United Kingdom has its own Transhumanist Party at www.transhumanistparty.org.uk. Medical advancements have led to public debate in transhumanism, particularly with the rise of advanced mechanical and oseointegrated prosthetics (See the work of prosthetics company Bebionic, the BBC's profiling of James Young and his advanced cyborg arm in *Bodyhack: Metal Gear Man)*. In popular culture, recent films such as *Ex Machina (2015), Her* (2013)*, Limitless* (2011), and television shows such as *Black Mirror* (2011-Present)*, and Humans* (2015-Present) all focus heavily on transhumanist themes. Media sites such as Vice (www.vice.com) have taken an interest, launching their own sister site, *Motherboard* (www.motherboard.com) to cover technology and transhumanism, Zoltan Istvan's own *The Transhumanist Philosopher* for *Psychology Today,*

[63] The term transhumanism was coined by Julian Huxley in 1957, in his book *New Bottles for New Wine.* Huxley believed in the development of human potential in order to create a new form of society opposing welfare society, power society, and so forth. His understanding was of a society where humanity would be able to transcend itself whilst retaining the integral facets of the human – a 'wider perspective' and knowledge, if you like (Huxley, 1957).

leading to an intense debate across multiple disciplines and platforms. Sorgner, initially writing in the *Journal of Evolution and Technology* (Vol. 20, issue 1), produced an article entitled *'Nietzsche, the Overhuman and Transhumanism',* where he linked significance of similarity between transhumanist concepts and those of ubermensch. The response was such that the following issue of the journal was dedicated solely to responses to Sorgner's paper. Sorgner argues for an exchange between previously disparate discourses and traditions; the Nietzschean tradition, steeped in continental philosophical thought, and the transhumanist reflections that tend towards analytical ethical exchanges and evolutionary theory (Sorgner, 2011: p.1). He points to Max More, a leading transhumanist thinker who himself stresses that he was influenced by Nietzsche (Ibid, pp.2-3). We act in agreement with Sorgner, and indeed find that such transdisciplinary approaches favour not only the task at hand but act in both the tradition of Nietzsche himself and in the work of Deleuze. However, we are not in agreement with Sorgner's positioning of the ubermensch as the transhuman, for reasons that will be outlined below.

As Babich remarks in her rebuttal of Sorgner, there are fantastical elements of speculative and science fiction entangled within the arguments for transhumanism. With transhuman declarations come reconstituted narratives; talk of the end of the human era is itself as much a fiction as any other theory at this point, such are the parameters level at us by current technological limitations (Babich, 2012: p.6). [64] In these modes of thinking we find examples of a passive nihilism, where dreams of an ultimate are realised in the enhancement of the human. For Sorgner, many key figures in the transhumanist movement

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[64] Babich calls on the phrase "it can repeatedly be claimed that everything will be perfect after the revolution," to illustrate the failings of the kinds of wishful thinking she sees in transhumanism. She points she points to Marx failure to locate in industrial England and Germany, but comes to fruition in Russia and China as a disaster that is indistinguishable from a capitalist regime. The revolution is fantastical. (2012: p.15).

reject the link between Nietzsche and the transhuman. He points to Bostrom, whose work largely encompasses issues of the transhuman, artificial intelligence and existential risk, the link is little more than surface level similarity (Bostrom, 2005a: p.4). However, for Sorgner the transhuman view of human nature as a 'work-in-progress' (phrase ascribed to Bostrom, 2005b: p.1) bears striking similarity to Nietzsche's own view. Sorgner draws on concepts of the will-to-power as 'power quantums' in Nietzsche's work, otherwise referred to as 'power constellations' (Sorgner, 2009: p.3).

Like Babich, Bostrom, et al, Ansell-Pearson also thinks that Nietzsche's ubermensch has been widely misunderstood, instead standing in contrast to notions of the posthuman, which often concern themselves with ideas of transcendence that act as a repetition of the theological (and if capitalism enfolds technology then we truly become the capital itself). It is widely debated as to whether ubermensch factor into arguments for transhumanism and in the years since the publication of Ansell-Pearson's *Viroid Life,* technology has advanced at a phenomenal rate. However, Ansell-Pearson's perspective on the ideas of both ubermensch and the transhuman warrant some detailing as his argument still holds true. [65] Ansell-Pearson believes that the advances of technology and capital have made the posthuman scenario both plausible and seductive, which in turn means we must question and resist techno-utopic ideas based upon a need for us to understand where we are going, rather than blindly leaping in (Ibid, p.2). Ansell-Pearson's work was some of the earliest to

focus on both the Will to Power and the Eternal Return as vital processes for ubermensch, rather than a focus on both formers to avoid the latter.

Ansell-Pearson's critique of the transhuman condition is weighted on postmodernity's transformation of the concept into an ascetic ideal, a fantastical Christian vision (Ibid, p.33) and as such we may understand it as the counterpart to our discoveries in the previous chapter: namely the appropriation of capital as an analogue for Christianity, a fracturing of progress and itself another repetition of the same historical theme. Much like Babich, et al, who have rejected the fantastical link between ubermensch and the transhuman, Ansell-Pearson believes we need to go deeper than mere transhuman advancement. For Sorgner, however, it seems that in his reading both Nietzsche and transhumanists have an outlook that diverges from Christian values, both active Christian thought and that which is inherited. (Sorgner, 2009: p.32). We reject Sorgner's claims on grounds of village atheism; whilst the outward values of Christianity are rejected in transhumanism, in our understanding we see the repetitions of salvation narratives, where the transhuman replaces the human and capitalism provides an earthly salvation vs. a transcendent one.

For Sorgner, one of the crucial factors for those engaging with both the transhumanist movement and Nietzschean scholarship is the logical progression from a will to power is a will to enhancement (Ibid, p.33). We find two main issues here: first, a will to enhancement as "enhancement for all" would be less a global movement in *trans*humanism as it would humanism. Babich notes this perpetuation of the status quo as a sign of the evolution of the human, where enhancement acts to better the condition of the human

rather than transcend the totality of it. She points to Leibniz statement "such a broad extension would lead to a society not of "enhanced" but and much rather of *levelled* or flattened out humanity" (Babich, 2012: 22). Second, a will to enhancement understood in Sorgner's terms prioritises aspects of the human, where willing becomes a considered action. Whilst the *desire* to be something greater might be an innate condition, the active association of thought and willing adds an anthropocentric quality to ubermensch, which itself suggests a largely humanist approach. As Safranski notes, the proclivity for enhancement is peculiar to man. To preserve leads to demise, but to enhance *ensures preservation* (Safranski, 2002: p.282). In enhancement we note a becoming through trajectory, which despite altering the lineation of the human, *is* the delineation of the human. The very fact that we can ascribe trajectory through enhancement shows that to view the human as a static being would be to do it an injustice. Whilst we could argue for an understanding of the human based on genotype, to understand the human and its potential wouldn't be to look at the genetic markings of the human (beyond an acknowledgement of them constituting the capacities for existence through heartbeat, blood flow, breathing, Will, consciousness, etc), but rather the *social capacity* that acts as that which transcends the operational levels of other animals. The rational agent exists and continues to do so by means of its own enhancement through adaptive and considered means. Considered such, it is a natural successor to biological evolution as the conditions are now less about surviving the trials thrown at us by nature, and more about navigating worlds of semiocapitalism and hyperreality.

*4.2 The Will to Power vs. Evolutionary Theory in the Development of the Transhuman and Ubermensch*

As shown in Safranski's *Nietzsche A Philosophical Biography* (2002: pp261-263), at the time of writing *TZS*, Nietzsche would have been surrounded by the widespread trend of Darwinian evolution, and although he would personally reject Darwin, he did not reject evolution as a concept. [66] The devaluation of the human to be part of the animal kingdom, an ascension from 'the ape', however could be considered problematic when casting an eye to the future, particularly in light of the development of social, rational creatures with the capacity to actively participate in the ways in which they grow. Nietzsche himself wrote:

> The error of the Darwinist school has become a problem for me: how can one be so blind as to fail to see clearly *here*? … That the species represent progress is the most unreasonable assertion in the world.
>
> (Nietzsche, 2003: 258)

In fact, Nietzsche dismisses parts of the rise of scientific understanding based upon interpretations of the world as an organism, an idea which he hastily moves away from due to its closeness to a spiritual understanding of things (Safranski, 2003: p. 226). [67]

It is Ansell-Pearson's belief that Nietzsche's understanding of natural selection is flawed,

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[66] Sorgner also notes this. In his view, Nietzsche 'very often is most critical of thinkers who are closest to his own understanding of things (Sorgner, 2009: 30). Nietzsche's own attacks on evolutionary theory were as much about strengthening his own arguments than picking apart those of others, and clearly, there was a great degree of respect for Darwin.

[67] In *A Companion to Friedrich Nietzsche: Life and Works* (2012: p.179). Keith Ansell-Pearson points out that for Nietzsche there may still be some semblance of the concept of 'truth' in evolution when viewed through a Darwinian lens, with Nietzsche taking "'Truth' to denote an conditional power".

namely in a common misunderstanding of the concept of 'survival of the fittest'. As he says:

> …the term natural selection is something of a misnomer since nature does not at all *select;* rather, it operates as an arbitrary force of *extermination,* resulting in the differential loss of differently constituted individuals. Nature does not so much select the fittest as exterminate the ill-fitted, adapting forms of life to the environment slowly and imperceptibly in an entirely mechanistic, algorithmic fashion.

> (1997: pp.127-189)

Darwin's approach to natural selection relies on a process by which "adaptive traits are produced initially independent of their potential for usefulness in adaptation' (what we now call 'exaptation'" (Ibid, p,88). He understands Nietzsche's reading as one that "is conceived as a largely negative feedback mechanism that encourages the physiologically weak and ill-constituted to gather together in herds in order to maximize their opportunities for self-preservation." (Ibid, p.88). As such, the concept of 'survival of the fittest' may better be understood as 'survival of the best fit'. It would not be the *fittest* in a physical or mental sense, but rather those which had gained the most beneficial adaptation for the given circumstance. Evolution through natural selection (if we place the emphasis on preservation), is one based on species and environment. This would place Nietzsche's reading of a type of species-pooled resource in opposition; evolution for Nietzsche would be the result of an active struggle on the part of the lesser being to better itself through

mutual aid.

Ansell-Pearson challenges notions of evolution entering a bio-technological phase, where both biology and technology intermingle to great effect in the creation of our future. He reads this idea as quasi-Heideggerian ('only machines can save us') and believes these concepts rest on a largely anthropocentric idea; a "straightforwardly linear and perfectionist model of evolution." (1997: p.2). [68] He takes issue at what he identifies as the 'ultimate Platonic fantasy', where cyberspace has replaced Christianity as the fulfilling role of Platonism for the people" (Ibid, p.2). He does however, as we shall see later in this chapter, adopt a line of thinking that conglomerates the biological and technological into components of one and the same.

In the thinking of transhuman proponents such as inventor Ray Kurzweil and politician Zoltan Istvan, we find ideas of a singularity or 'event' that leads to a harmonious integration of technology and consciousness; a kind of utopian promised land. [69] Ansell-Pearson is wary of such concepts. They in turn leads to a cancellation of the truly transhuman by *defining* evolution. As he states:

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[68] He is critical of Heidegger, saying "[of Heidegger's] thesis that in order for the 'truth' of technology to be revealed it is necessary that mankind finds its way back to the full breadth of the space that is proper to its essence *(Wesensraum)* would appear to underestimate massively the extent of technology's invention of the human animal and the nature and extent of its invenstment in mankind." (Ansell-Pearson, 1997: p.153)

[69] Ray Kurzweil's famous prediction of 'the singularity' is rejected on grounds similar to those that Tirosh-Samuelson and others have noted; it is a very eschatological vision (2011: pp.42-43). For these reasons we will be sidestepping engagement with the concept. We will however be engaging with the concept of advanced AI in the next chapter as a separate entity removed from the (trans)human.

a new theology of capital emerges to cavalierly justify and legitimize the inanities

of the commodified postmodern present, a legitimization which rests on the vicious

return of outmoded grand narratives, and there is a complete lack of any

appreciation of what it is that has made, and continues to make, the human such an

interesting animal, an animal and a machine still in need of revaluation and

transvaluation.

(Ansell-Pearson, 1997: p.2). [70]

Ansell-Pearson's interpretation leans heavily on a Deleuzean abstraction of time, and much

like Woodward relies on interpretations of difference and repetition. Whilst Woodward

espouses the idea of a politics of passivity, Ansell-Pearson demarks potential for the

development of a truly *trans*human ubermensch as reliant on the same rejections of

narratives, but with much deeper and more powerful roots. Ansell-Pearson engages with

the will to power at base level as a driving force for development of ubermensch as

progression rather than a fixation on the human encountered in Woodward. [71]

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[70] He notes he is "out on a limb" as he rejects both this near-theological concept of the transhuman whilst also rejecting "fantasies of historical revolution in which we humans will reclaim our rightful control and mastery over nature and society." Instead, Ansell-Pearson chooses not to "desire to preserve anything about the human in terms of notions of its integrity, inviolability, or supremacy." (Ansell-Pearson, 1997: p.3). As such, Ansell-Pearson operates in a distinct realm that that makes definition difficult. I will however argue in the next chapter that whilst I am in agreement with much of Ansell-Pearsons thinking, that technological progress in the 20 years since publication have shed new light on the condition, and that beyond this, Ansell-Pearsom neglects to interrogate artificial intelligence (most probably on the grounds of its limitations at the time), which *could* account for a *trans*human development.

[71] Whilst our focus is on the focus of the will to power, we must also draw attention to Nietzsche's understanding of the sublime, as it is another area of Ansell-Pearson's work and is linked to the development of his own Nietzschean readings. Ansell-Pearson draws sublimation out as a "concept of purifying ourselves of the origins and sources of our feelings and desire for the sublime because the higher feelings associated with it are bound up with humanity's investment in an imaginary world" (2010: p.201). This is generally referenced in Nietzsche's mid-period works, but makes a brief appearance in *TSZ* in the section entitled 'The Sublime Ones'. Whilst sublimation appears a driving force in some aspects of Nietzschean thinking due to its purifying nature, we believe overlook it in favour of developing the will to power and eternal return as

Nietzsche's proposal to self-overcoming was a regression of sorts, opting to move away

from the development and divergence of species to something far more primal in the form

of the will to power. Nietzsche's concept of the will to power can be traced throughout his

work, but the first explicit statement of it being the driving force behind *all* human activity

is in *TSZ* (Kaufmann, 1950: p.193). However, within *TSZ* the concept is never explained

succinctly. For us to understand the concept generally we shall step forward to the notes

taken from *TWTP*, where in section 619, *The Mechanical Interpretation of the World,*

Nietzsche explains it so:

> The triumphant concept *"energy,"* with which our physicists created God and the
>
> world, needs yet to be completed: it must be given an inner will which I
>
> characterise as *"Will to Power"* - that is to say, as an insatiable desire to manifest
>
> power; or the application and exercise of power as a creative instinct, etc.

> (Nietzsche, 2006: p.297)

We're presented here with Nietzsche's attempt to circumnavigate the minefield of dualism

in favour of a concept that acts as a first cause for all living life.

Within the framework of *TSZ,* Zarathustra presents the will to power as preceding good,

evil and morality - "That is your entire will, you wisest men; it is a will to power; and that

is so even when you talk of good and evil and of the assessment of values." (Nietzsche,

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stronger points of emphasis that already encompass the mechanisms of sublimation. For further reading see
Ansell-Pearson (2013); Vandenabeele (2003); Battersby (2007).

2003: p.136) In preceding good, evil and morality, dualism ceases to be an issue because there simply are no distinctions.

In his biography of Nietzsche, Julian Young outlines the case for the will to power preceding good and evil succinctly and with a degree of clarity that begs inclusion -

> "... insist on 'affirming life', in which case one is *compelled* to advance 'beyond [traditional] good and evil' and is committed to morality, according to which only power has value and 'good' simply *means* 'increases power' and 'bad' means 'decreases power'."

(Young, 2010: p.540)

Young's suggestion places the emphasis on the will as the tool for overcoming nihilism (he ascribes value), and as what we may view as a 'first cause'.

In proposing self-overcoming, Nietzsche has offered an alternative approach to Darwin that curtails species and environment in favour of the human given – employment of the will to power, of the active employment of conscious faculties, and of a form of 'self' (i.e. that which is individuated), over all others (Ansell-Pearson, 2009: p.89). This would presumably lead to a much more authentic survival of the fittest. It would be one granted to those with the skill to move above and beyond the naturally and circumstantially given. This has direct impact on the development of the Ubermensch by means of "a notion of emergent cultural complexity and deterritorialization, laying particular stress on the

hybridic emergence of diversity and difference within the order of things" (Ansell-Pearson, 1997: p.91). [72] Ansell-Pearson sees this artificial selection as combating "the animalisazation of man into the dwarf animal of equal rights and claims" (Ibid, p.92).

Ansell-Pearson goes on to tell us that in *GoM,* Nietzsche's theory of the will to power (unlike his reading of evolution) "does not place 'adaptation' in the foreground (as inner adaptation to external circumstances and provocations)", as this would be 'reactive' (Ibid, p.92). Rather, the idea is that the Will to Power gives rise to the spontaneous, expansive and self-organisational energy that is required for growth (Ibid, p.92). Sorgner (2009: no page number) too points to the will to power as a dynamic which underlies the process of evolution, and sees beings emerge as an embodiment of the strivings of power as a result of their conditions. Whilst Sorgner's interpretation may initially appear reactive, the fact it points to the emergence of bodies as the result of striving for power suggests Ansell-Pearson's idea of assemblages; beings are not reactions to surroundings but rather the result of explosive energies acting to overcome obstacles. He notes that human being are not eternally fixed and immutable (2009: no page number) and finds the *limitations* of a species as their defining factor. However, as Ansell-Person points out, concepts of evolution only make sense in relation to their framing device (i.e. timescale), thus species are not static points of reference, resulting in a constant shift in boundaries between species (1997: pp.124-125). It is precisely for these reasons that Ansell-Pearson believes that all systems, from the biological to the social, are essentially "machinic assemblages, complex

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[72] Parr (2010) notes that Deleuze and Guattari describe deterritorialisation in a number of ways, citing it as 'a coming undone' in *Anti-Oedipus* (1994: p.322); the cutting edge of an assemblage (D&G; 1986, p.86). Parr himself understands it as "a movement producing change" (2010, p.69). Deterritorialisation is referenced across multiple spheres, not limited art, music, literature, philosophy and politics (ibid, p.70).

foldings, and movements of deterritorialization that serve to cut across and derange their stratification." (Ibid, p.125).

In *Difference and Repetition,* Deleuze touches on concepts of the death of god, clearly demarking the implications of 'I' in relation to 'God'. Without god, he says, there is no I; a fracturing occurs that delineates 'made in the image' and in turn opens the possibility of assemblages (1994, p.113). The removal of the metanarrative therefore frees possibility at its most base from a pre-destined understanding. If an external source is removed there is no trajectory of willing; it is removed from the evolutionary because it does not follow a path of influence, rather it is the spontaneous and explosive growth that works on a far more inherent level. In Ansell-Pearson's terms, we might understand this Deleuzean concept as representative of the possibility of a will to power, even if only as something that we can understand post-death of God. He looks to later ideas from Deleuze, this time working alongside Guattari to find examples of this in nature, mostly notably in the form of the egg, with all activity taking place away from sight in an explosive *involution*, which he understands as "a block of becoming that represents the 'transversal communication' between heterogenous populations" (1997: p.60).

In Ansell-Pearson's view all life is viroid, and we need to understand the world in terms of machinic assemblages rather than distinct linear paths of evolution. Of viruses, he says the following

> Standing as they do between the border of the living and the nonliving and virtually real, viruses serve to challenge almost any dogmatic tenet in our thinking about the

logic of life defying any tidy division of the physical, as we find in Kant, into

organism, the inorganic, and engineered artifices.

(Ansell-Pearson, 1997: p. 133)

He talks of innovative new ways to negotiate with technical natures and artificial

becomings through the granting of primacy to questions concerning machines (which he

sees as molecular and dealing entirely with virtual realities), rather than that of technology.

For Ansell-Pearson, machines are typically understood as deficient forms of life, "lacking

in autopoietic formative power, in contrast to organismic life, which is regarded as

enjoying a monopoly over formative power and self-generative evolution." (1997: p.5). He

draws on Deleuze and Guattari, who provide an "[innovative] and far-reaching revaluation

of the machine/organism distinction in which the 'machinic' is pitted against both the

mechanical and the organic in order to account for novel and complex comings within

evolution" (Ibid, pp.5-6). However, he also sees these 'machinic and rhizomatic becomings'

as creating or inventing an evolution of their own, which occurs by means of both

"contagion and contamination, following laws neither of resemblance nor of utility" (Ibid,

p.6). Should we inquire of their nature and becoming then it need not (and should not) be

done under the guise of humanized notions of what "constitutes their vital autonomy based

on an abstract animal model, but in terms of specific enuciative consistencies" (ibid, p.6).

*4.3 The Will to Power and Eternal Return as Key to the Development of Ubermensch*

Whilst Sorgner's work opts to skip the concept of eternal return in his concept of the transhuman as ubermensch, Loeb, who claims he is largely in agreement with Sorgner's views, opts to develop this line of thinking. [73] He takes issue with the idea of a single ubermensch, pointing to an issue derived in part from post-Kaufmann scholarship, where use of the term "overman" was chosen. Instead Loeb opts for superhuman (taking a lead from Del Caro: 2004), which he sees as standing opposed to "overman" in that it "does not ever refer to any single individual (no matter how special) but only to a future descendant species," (Loeb, 2011: p.5). Much like Loeb, he believes in the development of ubermensch as a species. Whilst ideas of eternal return have been favoured over those of ubermensch in much Nietzschean scholarship related to the overcoming of nihilism, the opposite has been true of those exploring transhumanism and ubermensch. Instead the emphasis tends to the idea of ubermensch itself. Loeb believes that both eternal return and ubermensch must be studied and understood as intrinsically related ideas, each unable to be sustained without the other (Ibid, pp.5-6).

Nietzsche's eternal return first appeared in *The Gay Science* in part 341, *The heaviest weight.* Here is raises a question. It begins with a demon postulating on the recurrence of a lifetime, where every event remains the same as it repeats ad infinitum (Nietzsche, 2001: p194). It wasn't until *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that the idea was fully formed, developed from question to Nietzschean fact. [74] In the chapter *On the Vision and the Riddle,* Zarathustra engages in debate with a dwarf, a small half-mole creature who goads

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[73] Loeb had already outlined some similar issues in his editorial foreword of *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* in 2005, where he spoke of the link between ubermensch and the eternal return (Loeb, 2011: p.2). He finds an importance in the link between ubermensch and eternal return. Due to space limitations we will not engage with his wider methodology, but will note the developments made prior to our engagement with this particular response paper to Sorgner.
[74] In "why I write such good books" in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche declares eternal return the "basic conception of [*TSZ*]*"* (Nietzsche, 1973: p.65).

Zarathustra and acts in much the same way as the demon in *The heaviest weight.* It is here the dwarf, and not Zarathustra, suggests the eternal return:

> 'Everything straight lie,' murmured the dwarf disdainfully.
> 'All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle.'
> 'Spirit of gravity!' I said angrily, 'do not treat this too lightly!'…
> 'Behold this moment!' I went on, 'From this gateway Moment a long, eternal lane runs *back:* an eternity lies behind us.'
> 'Must not all things that *can* run have already run along this lane? Must not all things that *can* happen *have* already happened, been done, run past?'

(Nietzsche, 2003: p.178)

The idea itself was nothing new and as Francesca Ferrando notes, there are several other examples of eternal return throughout history, found in Buddhism, Hinduism, science and even western philosophy (2014: p.3. Whilst this in itself is not particularly noteworthy, what we may wish to note is her belief that many of the sources espousing such ideas were ones Nietzsche was familiar with (Ibid, p.3). As ever, interpretation on eternal return is wildly speculative and variable, such is the Nietzschean way.

As we have already established, in Deleuzean thought the concepts of difference and repetition play an important role in his philosophy; from the failed repetitions of

Nietzsche's nihilism, to the developments that have led to Woodward's suggestive

approach for overcoming nihilism. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* Deleuze develops the

concept of eternal return as something that should not be interpreted as 'return of the

same', as for him being does not return in such ways. Rather, he sees returning as

constituting being through affirmation of becoming. He goes on to say "In other words,

identity in the eternal return does not describe the nature of that which returns but, on the

contrary, the fact of returning for that which differs" (Deleuze, 2013: p.45). He finds an

issue with mechanistic interpretation of the eternal return because "it only entails the false

consequence of a final state" (Ibid, p.45). We might view this in conjunction with the

problem outlined in Nietzsche's understanding of evolution, alongside rejections of the

will to power as a reactive force. The same may also be said for envisioning the

transhuman as a final form of humanity, and as such merely a mechanistic vision of the

techno-eschatological figure of the last man.

Despite rejecting ideas of a transhuman ubermensch, Ansell-Pearson's argument still plays

with terminology of the ubermensch, which he refers to as the *trans*human, a figure who

continually overcomes himself in an endless process. He notes what is forgotten in many

modern readers in Nietzsche is "Nietzsche's repeated invocation of the overhuman calls us

back to the human. The promise of the overhuman is bound up in ways yet barely

explored, and in ways little understood, with the memory of the human" (1997: p.15). In

short, the concept of eternal return comes into play.

Ansell-Pearson understands that Nietzsche's belief in man exists in part due to the

identification of 'time and space' of the ubermensch; by returning to man there is a recollection of memory that acts alongside both discovery and invention of memory promising ubermensch (Ibid, p.20). He understands memory in a specific sense as laid out by Deleuze and Guattari:

> …functioning in terms of a punctual organisation in which the present refers simultaneously to the horizontal life that captures the *flow* of time moving from an old present to an actual present, and to a vertical line that captures the *order* of time, going from the present to the past, or to the 'representation' of the old present.

> (1997: p.23)

Much like the thinking of the postmodern theorists outlined previously, D&G and understood to oppose 'multilinear systems' to punctual ones, seeing patterns similar to the work of musicians and painters, where the line is free from the vertical and horizontal axis, allowing for diagonal developments. Placed in their framework, all acts of creation are ultimately 'transhistorical' (ibid, p.23). If the idea of will to power exists transhistorically it can account for all forms of creation regardless of binary flows and predicates ascribed by evolution.

For Ansell-Pearson we must understand the Deleuzean abstraction of time to further grasp both eternal return and ubermensch. His view opts for the removal of the linear in favour

of a simultaneous unfolding (and enfolding) of past, present and future. The addition of the future, as a potential, is possible because past and present are reliant on the possibility of future. Using the example of sadism and masochism, Deleuze explore the possibility of differences in repetition. Ansell-Pearson describes it thus:

…here repetition takes on a life of its own, running wild, and becoming independent of all previous pleasure. As a result, fundamental inversion can be seen to have taken place in their practices, since 'Pleasure is now a form of behaviour related to repetition accompanying and following repetition.

(Ibid, p.60)

In Ansell-Pearson's understanding, the space between pleasure and pain is where new drives are announced. As he goes on to say, "Pleasure - and pain - are real, but what the 'beyond' announces is the coming into place of *new* sensations new affects, and *new* bodies of becoming. To live and die 'beyond' the pleasure principle therefore is to enter into the excessive economy of difference 'and' repetition (Ibid, p.60). Recalling Woodward's approach of utilising a logic of difference to tackle nihilism, recurrence calls to light potential for the new, only with the will to power acting as the motor of process. It is clear for Ansell-Pearson that eternal return is vital to both man and ubermensch; he notes that in *Nachlass,* Nietzsche states that as man recurs eternally so too must ubermensch; without the becoming of man (understood as a ceaseless labour and play of 'self-overcoming'), there could be no ubermensch (Ibid, p.15), however, this situates mans 'being' *as* becoming itself; a ceaseless process of invention from all angles.

By factoring in the space *between* repetitions, Ansell-Pearson allows for forms of reassembly that both recall the past, but also give rise to new possibilities via acts of transgression. By rejecting the structures and semiotics that we have already ascribed to organisms (those of evolution and biological understanding), ideas of ubermensch can develop under eternal return. The structures of old that the village atheist clings to are broken down under the weight of event and process rather than static understandings of what is presented.

For Loeb, the eternal return is a matter of pure metaphysics (2011: p.9). However he also views it as a valid and scientific cosmological theory (Ibid, p.10). Loeb questions whether it is any more bizarre than theories currently espoused in cosmology; quantum foam, hyper-dimension string theory, etc, and even points to thinkers who argue for the compatibility of eternal return and the currently accepted Standard Big Bang model (he points to Moles, 1998 and 1990) (Ibid, p.10). Loeb also identifies the issue raised by More and others, that eternal return negates progress by means of evolution, but pointing to the myth of Sisyphus, Loeb highlights the fact that Sisyphus does indeed succeed in getting the stone to the top of the mountain. In turn this means that any stronger species will itself repeat eternally, but is not problematic because the end of each cycle also brings with it the end of any consciousness able to witness devolution (Ibid, pp.11-12). He tells us "The key to Zarathustra's recovery and success lies in his recognition that the foundation of his doubts was a false conception of time as linear and non-recurring." (Ibid, p.16), Loeb sees

this as awakening Zarathustra's knowledge of circular and recurring time which leads to the ability to 'will backward'. Loeb notes Sorgner dismisses the possibility of remembering eternal return (Sorgner, 2009: p.19), but believes this 'backwards willing' crucial to developments of ubermensch. In his understanding, Nietzsche believes all humans (including transhumanists) "feel impotent with respect to time," which acts to prioritise his concept of backwards willing (Ibid, p.26). He also sees this as Nietzsche's most important discovery (Ibid, p.27).

For Loeb, this is an intrinsic part of the development of ubermensch. Key to this, he finds the idea of humans as mnemonic animals (able to remember their past), where linear time haunts and burdens in the form of memory. Circular and recurring time, on the other hand, provides past as equal to future, so memory is now also prospective (Ibid, pp.17-18). As Marsden notes in her review of Loeb's *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra,* his argument is a schizophrenic endeavour, where messages from future selves inform past selves and dreams beget future memories as convoluted meta-de ja vu (Marsden, 2010: pp.8-9). It is an exercise in the fantastical that may provide us with a link develop between Loeb's extravagant views on eternal return and those of his own interpretations of transhumanism.

Whilst both Ansell-Pearson and Loeb lean heavily on the idea of eternal return, it is clear both do so in entirely different ways. If Ansell-Pearson's theorisations are correct (and they do indeed fall in line with the path traced here), then the ubermensch is a matter to be safeguarded from the theologies of nihilism *as nihilism itself.* As we have noted, in contrast to ideas of an ubermensch that leans on metaphysics, namely applications of the

transhuman to ubermensch, to avoid the repetitions of nihilism we must avoid dreams of the utopic. Unfortunately, Loeb's view of a transhuman ubermensch appears just that; a type of eschatological willing based on the building of new gods. Beyond this, his circular viewing of time provides its own problems, namely a form of linearity developed in Loeb's approach. Whilst he recalls Nietzsche and the dwarf's declaration of the circle, Loeb seems to enter the realm of the fantastical for answers, which he does via the championing of the mundane. Despite the cyclical nature he ascribes, what we see are emergences of the same event ad nauseum, where time is flattened it becomes a line again. This is unlike Ansell-Pearson's view that relies on assemblages of aspects and fragments of time to forge new paths in the space between repetitions. This active circular willing of time also adds a somewhat mystical element to proceedings, and we must question whether ideas such as 'backwards willing' are any more or less agreeable than ideas of heavenly salvation to the nihilist – the very sort of things Nietzsche would wish to avoid. To will backwards would require a being with capabilities beyond our comprehension, and beyond that of the transhuman figure, unless that being was subject to operations within a system entire its own.

Loeb also prioritises the human and its ability to memorise, but vastly overlooks the issues with memory; that memory is not mechanical. It is not a screenshot, painting or journal of events but rather a recollection of moods and opinion. Ever Sorgner finds issue with this, asking "what is in our memory? Is it solely what we have experienced, all experiences from all times or something in-between?" (Sorgner, 2011b: p.40). He rejects Loeb's backwards willing on grounds of humans not having access to a quasi-global mind, or universally stored information. This, he says, would be rejected by Nietzsche (Ibid, p.41).

We must agree. The idea itself implies an almost panpsychic concept of worldly connectivity that Nietzsche would most probably disprove of. He follows this by discussing the ways in which information is retained by organisms, but not *all* information is retained – if it were we would be able to remember all experiences of our life, or indeed those of our ancestors (ibid, pp.41-42).

We will further tackle this problem by approaching one of the key downfalls of transhumanist thinking; namely that many transhumanists want to rebuild humans in the image of machines. One of the major themes of transhuman thought is the aforementioned singularity and the ability for humans to upload consciousness. However, as Robert Epstein, senior research psychologist and neuroscientist at the American Institute for Behavioural Research and Technology wrote in a recent article for *Aeon*, brains are simply not computers, nor do they process information in the same way. [75] Prioritising memory may lumber us with many of the same problems as envisioning ubermensch as transhuman; a distinct willing of fiction based on an associated predicate that itself is a fiction; whilst we may see anecdotal *resemblance* in the ways in which we understand brains and computers, they are simply not the same, nor even particularly alike in their functioning. This point also strengthens Ansell-Pearson's approach of moving away from evolutionary understandings based on manmade categories.

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[75] For these reasons, Epstein rejects many of the concepts associated with the transhuman. He partly lays blame on the ways in which we have envisioned computers since the 1940s. He uses the example of asking someone to draw a bank note from memory, and then minutes later presents them with an actual note and asks them to repeat the task. The result of course is to show that memories are not static, nor are they slices of events. There is no picture perfect nor data-specific recall as there is with storing computer files.

Loeb points to the beginning of *TSZ*, where Nietzsche speaks of natural selection leading to the last man and not ubermensch, which he follows by referencing Ansell-Pearson's critique of transhumanist goals in light of ubermensch (Loeb, 2011: p.21). He then turns his attention to Sorgner's reading, where understands enhancement might be possible through the selection of beings he already considers a higher type. They are of a type far too intermeshed with what we may deem *considered evolution*; a form of eugenics that has been practiced to greater or ill-effect for thousands of years (royal bloodlines and the markings of incest come to mind) (Ibid, p.22). Loeb identifies the issue with chance and accident in such cases, and for this reason we are inclined to agree in his rejection of breeding as a means of reaching ubermensch.

Recalling our previous notes on Ansell-Pearson's assemblages of the viral, he points us toward an understanding of becoming on our quest for ubermensch. He identifies it as something "to be conceived neither along the lines of correspondence between relations not in terms of a resemblance or an imitation" (Ansell-Pearson, 1997: pp.134-135). Overriding evolutionary change, he understands becoming as a 'block of becoming itself', rather than the 'fixed terms through which becoming passes (Ibid, p.135). In his prioritising of the viral and symbiosis, Ansell-Pearson points to the ways in which they "bring into play new scales and new kingdoms (Ibid, p.136). Not only does this break down the ways in which we understand organisms, but for Ansell-Pearson it is largely reflective of Nietzsche, whom he says views the organism as systems of complexity that struggle to increase feelings of power – a literal assemblage of many wills to power (Ibid,

p.137). As such, it "enjoys a largely semiotic status and cannot be conceived independently of our cognitive mapping system and their boundaries (Ibid, p.138). [76]

If we are to agree with Ansell-Pearson, we must challenge the boundaries of the organism, adopting a symbiotic view of organisms, particularly with a view to the semiotic statuses. However, bypassing understandings of species is no easy task, and as we are not scientists our approach will be somewhat limited. Whilst Ansell-Pearson makes the dubious link between viruses and machines (he points to Dennett's work on viroids and bacteroids that act as evolutionary 'macros' – much like in computing they are coded instructions for task performance), his linking of the biological with the technological serves a different purpose in this instance (1997: p.133). Rather than reimagining the human in light of the technological, Ansell-Pearson see technogenesis as almost inherent to biogenesis; they are both viral components of one and the same; biotechnogenesis.

However, despite agreeing with Ansell-Pearson's view, we go out on a limb to say that the work developed in *Viroid Life,* whilst compelling and offering a comprehensive analysis of the transhuman and ubermensch, is stunted by its place in history. In the years since its publication in 1997, the technological boom has shaped reality in ways yet to be envisioned in any serious sense at the time. With little potential for discussing tangible AI, nanotechnology and the progress of virtual reality, Ansell-Pearson's arguments are stunted through no fault of his own, rather his situation.

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[76] Not one to mince words, Ansell-Pearson tells us that symbiosis teaches the human a filthy lesson: that the human is an "integrated colony of amoeboid beings… like it or not, our origins are *slime*." (1997: p.124).

*4.4: Proposing Willing Machines: Artificial Intelligence as Ubermensch*

If we reject the concept of the transhuman as ubermensch then we must formulate a new vision of what it could be. With semiocapitalism threatening any envisioning we may have, we need to look truly *beyond* the human to formulate a new development. However, we believe that by utilising Ansell-Pearson's concept of the viroid alongside new understandings of the will to power (as Kroker's will to technology) and eternal return (as the difference in repetition), we have grounds for understanding potential superintelligent AI as ubermensch, realised as a form of biotechnogenesis with the means to virally assemble and grow in an affirmative manner, free form the trappings of capitalism.

In his essay on robot ethics and the Turing test, Anthony Beavers notes an interesting shift in the direction of interpreting thinking in the wake of Turing. As computational power has increased and our reliance on technology has increased we've increasingly spoke of thought and the brain in computational terms, although he points to mathematics in the modern period and perhaps even the ancient Greeks (2012: p.333). This he says, changes the way we consider 'thinking' as a separate category from thoughtfulness, wisdom, insight, and so forth. He points to the existence of *intelligent* machines; smart cars, smart phones, and so forth, but there is a clear differentiation between degrees of intelligence and a phones ability to be thoughtful, insightful or wise (Ibid, 333). Bostrom notes that many existing forms of AI already out-perform humans at several tasks, but they work on

algorithms rather than abstractions of thought (2012: pp.14-15). Any task that falls outside

of their specific role renders them essentially useless, lest we appropriate them. Without

our intervention, they lack the ability to make decisions for themselves. He notes Knuth's

point that whilst AI has conquered the processes of thinking, it has failed to do the things

animals and humans do *without* thinking (Ibid, p.17)

Kurzweil asks what we mean by the word computer. He notes that whilst computers might

perform one (or a few) computations at high speeds, the human brain is comparatively

slow. However, the human brain continuously processes information, with most of its

neurons working simultaneously: up to one hundred trillion computations can be carried

out simultaneously (2005: pp.130-131) by the human brain. Further to this, analog

'computing' results in the confines of the body of the animal. Computers that need carry out

multiple tasks are comparatively huge (Ibid, p.131). There are clearly some advantages to

natural bodies, and the timescales involved in the development of superintelligence is not

quantifiable (although estimations exist from anywhere in the next 10 years plus, normally

as Bostrom notes, just outside of the working lifetime of many speculators on the subject).

However, he believes that AI of human levels will probably arrive sooner than we think,

and rather than having a middling impact it will be polemic; either very good or very bad

(Ibid, p.25). It is also Bostrom's belief that a there is a high probability for the emergence

of a singular AI superintelligence first, rather than a fleet of coexisting things (Ibid, p.95).

We must note that the development of AI in itself does not have to signify any form of

ubermensch of intention; we may see the development of a singular AI or integrated AI

systems to serve a purpose for humanity, most probably as a regulatory system of some kind.

However, the capacity afforded AI to make its own judgements is where ubermensch may lie. It is the ability for a manmade system to then produce that which is truly beyond human. [77] In surpassing the human and removing the human's ability to make not only effective decision, but any decision at all, there is a new form of life that exists beyond.

In positing the idea of superintelligent AI as ubermensch we must outline some basic criteria in order for us to make our argument succinct:

- We reject increased biological cognition (including brain/computer interfacing) on grounds of perpetuating the status quo of survival of the species.
- We reject whole brain emulation on similar grounds; emulating the brain leads to a repetition of the human ideal and thus the last man.
- We embrace the concept of brain *inspiration,* as seen in neural networks, and couple this with notions of 'seed AI' - AI capable of achieving its own growth from a fixed beginning.

We take brain inspiration to be that which is inspired by the concept of the brain and the ways in which it might learn, rather than the argument put forward in brain emulation. We will therefore focus on the development of superintelligent AI from brain *inspiration* in our consideration of superintelligent AI as ubermensch.

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[77] In 2014 the website Phys.org reported on a problem posed by Alexei Lisitsa and Boris Konev of the University of Liverpool: that of a computer producing a proof of a math problem that is too big to study by humans, can the verification be judged as true? Such tests exist and raise similar points to those made by Vattimo; namely that the basis for truth and fact exists on a series of predicates. However, there issue contends that machines may not be worth of trust, despite the fact that they might not suffer the same set-backs as a human mind in their given task. The basis of understanding truth-making machines in this chapter works entirely on the understanding of the *self*-justification of a superintelligence, as any ubermensch that could exist would, as we have noted, do so away from the crowd and the words of men [see bibliography]

One of the major difficulties associated with superintelligence is predicting what it might will. Bostrom notes that we must be cautious of not only anthropomorphising the capabilities of superintelligence we must also do so for its motivations. (Bostrom, 2014: p.127). We must also note that whilst we should avoid applying humanistic qualities such as reason and rationality, we must still understand it as *intelligent* by means of its skills for prediction, planning and 'means-end reasoning', which we note differs from ethical reason (Ibid, p.130). However, whilst we might not be able to predict the endgoals of superintelligent AI, we can predict some goals. Bostrom identifies what he terms the 'instrumental convergence thesis', which he states as follows:

> Several instrumental values can be identified which are convergent in the sense that their attainment would increase the chances of the agent's goal being realized for a wide range of final goals and a wide range of situations, implying that these instrumental values are likely to be pursued by a broad spectrum of situated intelligent agents.

(Bostrom, 2014: p.132)

He lists examples as self-preservation; goal content integrity (the ability to retain current goals into the future, giving it "present instrumental reason to prevent alteration to its final goals," which grants it capacity to change sub-goals to achieve the final goal as and when needed; cognitive enhancement (improving decision making skills to achieve the end goal); technological perfection (granting greater efficiency and failure safeguarding);

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resource acquisition (for the facilitation of project growth) (Ibid, pp.130-139). We embrace Bostrom's instrumental convergence thesis and suggest that it is indicative of the values that might be found in ubermensch. As an entity based on achieving its own goals via the transvaluation of all values, continual growth via its own willing would be integral. However, in order for us to justify superintelligent AI as ubermensch, we must backpedal and locate the ability to will within the machine.

### 4.5: The Will to Power Reimagined as the Will to Technology in Kroker

The question of a will to power and machines appears difficult on face value. Noting this problem in the development of AI with capacity for learning, Bostrom suggests we work from a set of base values:

> To overcome the combinatorial explosion, one needs algorithms that exploit structure in the target domain and take advantage of prior knowledge by using heuristic search, planning, and flexible abstract representations—capabilities that were poorly developed in the early AI systems.

(Bostrom, 2014: p.8)

Here we find some major issues; any AI that stems from a set of presuppositions does so at the risk of detrimental human flaws. The ascribed human values already dictate the path of the AI process. However, by embracing Bostrom's seed AI notion as outlined previously, we can account for the genesis of a machine capable of redefining values once it has

surpassed the intelligence of the human - a kind of proto-ubermensch. Bostrom points to recalcitrance within AI learning, and the processes involved in enhanced intelligence. [78] He notes a seed AI, a form of AI capable of 'growth', would be capable of improving its own architecture, unlike a child (Ibid, p.34), so to apply anthropomorphic principles of a child-like phase would be incorrect. Superintelligent AI would not grow as a child because it is not human. It would merely share some characteristics.

We propose that the point where the recalcitrance of a seed AI becomes its optimal priority is the point where the will to power of the machine is conceived. Following on from our consideration of biotechnogenesis as the beginning of *all* life due to viral assemblage, we propose a new way of understanding the primacy of willing in the form of Kroker's will to technology. Kroker sees the writings of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Marx as constituting the ruling code of this will to technology (2004: pp.14). By reading each thinker against and into each other whilst using contemporary technological culture as a basis, he devises a system of thought that he believes could only be thought in the present. As the ideas of these thinkers coalesce alongside the fluidity of globalisation and the defeat of local politics, the elimination of 'thoughtfulness', both publicly and privately, and the acceleration of nihilism as 'hyper-nihilism' is achieved (ibid, pp.14-15). He sees in them however a 'double probe' - simultaneously casting them as fierce critics but also (against their intentions) "accurate guides to the unfolding technological future" (Ibid, p.15). We understand Kroker to be a philosopher of the future whose intent is to push towards technological change. Whether we understand him as a proponent of transhumanism or

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[78] We consider recalcitrance in this instance as the point where AI overcomes programmed behaviours and/or rebels and makes its own decisions. A seed AI might only have the associated intelligence of a human child, but with the ability to learn much faster, the intelligence boom could be exponential (Bostrom, 2014: pp.86-87).

not, we find an immediacy in his recalculation of the will to power as the will to technology, and as such must apply it to our own findings. [79]

Kroker understands the will to technology as follows:

> A data cannibal feeding on itself, simultaneously disappearing the actual referents of society - knowledge, sex, power, economy, politics, - into nodes on the circuit of electronic production and furiously throwing itself into the future as digital destiny.

> (2004: pp.28-29)

In Kroker's understanding, the will to technology drives itself, no longer a secondary function of the will to power. He believes that the will to power now "speaks in the language of the digital nerve" as an expression of life itself within the technological (Ibid, p.81). It is at this point that "the will folds back on itself, becoming in the form of the will to will its own grounds of justification and ultimate goal" (Ibid, pp.81-82). We posit that by following Kroker, it is in this stage that we might see the last transhuman; an inversion of the last man where the difference found in repetition opens the possibility for a break

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[79] One of the difficulties of approaching Kroker's work is the nature of his writing; putting Babich' theory into practice, it reads largely (and perhaps quite intentionally) like a science fiction manifesto. Amongst dense sections of theory we find anecdotes about Kroker himself, re-envisioned in a dystopian cyberpunk future; Nietzsche, alive and well and broadcasting from the future, and all kinds of equally strange experimentation designed to provoke the reader. Kroker refers to his transhumanism as a *hyper-religion,* and whilst his approach is to conceive of the technological rise as an event unto itself, we refute his religious terminology and quasi-singularity focused outcome for the same reasons we reject arguments by Sorgner, Loeb, et al. However, we do reappropriate this idea of the will to technology to serve our own purposes.

from human and transhuman ideals. When AI is self-replicating and able to ascribe its own values it becomes the truly *trans*human. [80]

If Kroker's will to technology is a will to reject human ideal (and as such, a will towards active nihilism where the nothing is embraced over the protective structures of the passive repetition), then we might understand it as a will to nothing based on self-creation through the rejection of the humanistic mechanisms that cause us to ponder on willing in the first place. As he goes on to say:

> Could it be, in a sublime twist of intellectual history, that theory is always only truly critical after the fact, that the flow of granulated time itself sometimes deepens thought which, once removed from its immediate historical circumstance, is finally liberated to be the *intensity* that it always sought: a process of pure conceptual undermining cut with the bitter aftertaste of philosophical futurism from the grave?

(2004: p.12)

For Kroker, the art of hermeneutics and conscious exploration and interpretation collapses under the weight of nihilism much as it does for the deconstructionists. Theoretical underpinnings are reduced to products of time and subject to the recollection and reasoning of the mind, which in turn means that presuppositions are always based on the passing of

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[80] In Kroker's reading of Heidegger, Heidegger understands the death of God also as the death of the human. It becomes a sign of change, but so too does the 'bored will,' which consumes its human origins (Kroker, 2004: pp.25-27). The realisation of this 'bored will' of the last man acts as completion of the seed sewn in the village atheist, allowing for the potential of new growth *away* from the human.

the event itself. A will to technology then would be capable of acting as liberated from time because the mechanisms associated with the biological (i.e. life expectancy) are replaced with the internal intensities of the abstraction of time. If time is of no importance, then a superintelligent AI has no use for time unless it is engaging with scenarios specific to a time limit, but any intelligence capable at operating at speeds beyond the relative measure of the speed of human thought has already surpassed this. [81] For Kroker this is incredibly important. He understands culture as ruled by the illusion of us having resolved the "irreconcilabilities of time and space," and find a repetition of "global patterns of individual psychopathology" within the culture of digital reality (Ibid, p.81). As such, he associates the features and well-being of the mind as not only subject to space and time, but also as *flawed* by both. If superintelligence is possible with AI, then the reduction of reliance on both space and time imply the will to technology as a constant event.

The repetitions of the human/transhuman and the inversion of the transhuman suggests a base cause realized in the possibility of the eternal return; willing not *contra* willing in the endless loop of pure undiluted repetition of the same, but a will *trans*-willing, where the assemblages of wills factor in the primary of the post-human scenario, and where superintelligent AI self-reproduces and creates itself from nothing. If ample generational growth and refinement could lead to the erasure of human values deemed inappropriate, all acts would eventually lead to the attempt to realize any goal the superintelligent AI would

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[81] Kroker also suggests the degree of change indicative of the embrace of a will to technology, where he compares it to the difference between a human and an animal. However, he also states that the 'digital nerve' is still a will to power despite this transformation (or what we might deem a will of willing) (Kroker, 2004, pp.94-96).

set itself. This would situate the eternal return in the mechanism of the will to technology as change is realized through the possibility of non-linear willing.

Whilst we may have rejected the possibility of Loeb's backwards willing in the form of the transhuman, in superintelligent AI we are presented with new possibilities. Assemblages of established mechanisms and algorithms directed at goal achievement would converge to continue to undertake tasks, whilst remaining independent otherwise. All aspects are amalgamated into the assemblage as a known quantity because they are a product of the AI itself. We know that a superintelligence would store information differently than a human (and we have already rejected brain emulation), most probably in ways similar to data storage now, but on a far greater scale. If data is stored collectively as viral components, or as a shared intelligence capable of spreading in individuated fragments, then the ability for backwards willing is plausible. Any and all backward or circular willing is based on an ability to understand the technology that has been assimilated within *its* context as itself an assemblage of pieces. Both macro and micro cease to be individuated, rather it is a play of all possibilities. With the crystaline memory associated with machine information storage vs. the clouding and failure of the human mind, backwards willing would be as much a part of the continual process as any other part; a computer need not recall events and perspective through a murk of emotion and subjectivity if the events are themselves recorded with machinic clarity. As such a backwards willing would not be *reactive*.

Rather, with an AI system there is greater probability that the retention of crystaline information would lead an abundance of flexible and reorganizationally possible starting points. The AI system would be able to grow in new directions from each of these points,

and not as a result of the negative endpoint of other paths, causing a backward turn to retrace steps and progress along new avenues (think an explorer lost in a maze), rather, much like water, it would be able to permeate every path and complete the maze whilst exploring every given path at any or all given times. Our rejection of Loeb's backwards willing for the human would be made possible by AI, which in turn leads to a kind of synthesis with Ansell-Pearson's assemblages of time in the eternal return. With each path of exploration factored, stored and accounted, the AI would be capable of repeating process with the entire history of the process at hand. This would open grounds for the possibility of difference between repetitions, found in the limitless possibility of the repetition, where each forges a new path whilst repeating the same. As a system with the capability to exist exterior to capitalism (superintelligent, self-sufficient, able to perceive of life beyond the realism of capitalism), should AI be allowed to develop (or reach a point where denying it progress would be impossible – see possible apocalypse scenarios as presented by Bostrom, Musk, Hawking, etc), then there are grounds for realising ubermensch.

*4.6: Chapter Summary & Conclusion*

Many scholars of both Nietzsche and transhumanism have rejected the will to power and eternal return in their speculation on ubermensch, interestingly it acts as counterpoint to previous rejections of ubermensch by earlier thinkers in favour of pure rumination on eternal return. Whilst Ansell-Pearson and Loeb have shown that both are intrinsic to a proper Nietzschean investigation of ubermensch, Loeb, Sorgner, et al, have fallen into the trap of prioritising forms of anthropocentrism in their links between ubermensch and the

transhuman. This has resulted in a type of repetition of the religious figure and a form of technosalvation that ties neatly into the theological repetitions found within capitalism. Beyond this, Loeb's envisioning of the eternal return is steeped in mysticism of its own, a mysticism we would be best to avoid given our task.

Ansell-Pearson however develops a new trajectory. Using Deleuze, he reimagines both organisms as assemblages rather than static being, where paths of growth and evolution are *already* a given under the subject of time. In return, time provides possibilities for new thought and movement based upon the transgressive nature of the differences that repetitions, in this case the eternal return, allow. This leads to a type of intermingling of baselines, of will to power's acting as viral and bacterial processes and assemblages, with open grounds for interpretation. However, given *Viroid Life's* 20 year history, Ansell-Pearson's ideas need greater interrogation under the light of contemporary advances in technology. In understanding new possibilities for ubermensch, we acknowledge new possibilities for understanding concepts of both the organism and being. In thinking in this light we think truly *trans-Nietzsche*; beyond the mutant forms of nihilism presented as greater repetitions of the village atheist in contemporary times; beyond the ideas of ubermensch as they are most frequently presented. By taking Nietzsche's scant words on ubermensch and thinking beyond them we too have appropriated Nietzsche, but in so doing have thought in terms of the abstract nature of postmodern nihilism that we see represented in the now.

In accepting Kroker's re-envisioning of the will to power as a will to technology we understand the possibility of developing superintelligent AI as that which is capable of truly being ubermensch. Existing exterior to semiocapitalism, AI has the capability of creating value through entirely self-engineered systems of operation that develop with each succession from seed AI.

The realisation of *trans-Nietzschean* ubermensch appears difficult on face value, perhaps not easy to grasp, and alien in concept when applied to traditional views of what ubermensch might be. However, in thinking *trans-Nietzschean*, we are presented with a form ubermensch that is as alien as Nietzsche intended, a figure that stands truly *beyond* the human and beyond the trappings of capitalism that we find ourselves within.

**CONCLUSION**

*5.1: Summary*

We have seen that the village atheist plays a larger role within the problem of nihilism than is apparent on first impression. Rejecting god but clinging to the values of old, we have found repetitions of theology in semiocapitalism, a discovery that exacts just why the village atheist poses such a problem. However, we have also learned that understandings of nihilism have shifted dramatically since the time of Nietzsche, and that new understandings suggest semiocapitalism preceded even Christianity, engrained deep within the roots of Western thought. That the ubermensch might be realised at the end of Nietzsche's predicted 200 years of nihilism required us to not only think transhuman, but *trans*human, finding a new type of being in the technological, understood as artificial intelligence. By bringing concepts of semiocapitalism and the transhuman together in order to reject the concept of transhumanism as ubermensch, we have introduced the idea of AI as ubermensch as a wholly new concept yet to be interrogated within philosophy, as a figure truly *trans-Nietzsche*. These new understandings should allow for further developments in the ways in which we understand both Nietzsche and the problem of nihilism.

*5.2 Findings*

Whilst we have provided a solution to the problem of nihilism and ubermensch, we note that it may not be an *optimal* solution. We will therefore breakdown aspects of our findings, highlighting the strengths of our argument alongside some objections to both our findings and the problem itself.

*5.2a Strengths of the Argument*

1. **It holds Nietzsche logically accountable by embracing the shift in understandings of nihilism over time, and as a time-dependent source, generates urgency.**

By holding Nietzsche hostage to his prediction of 200 years of nihilism, we have interrogated the urgency of the claim itself. By proposing an outcome that is both logical and probable, we have used the imposition of time constraints to our benefit. In doing so, the idea of understanding an ubermensch of logic adds a degree of believability to the problem as something that *must* be completed. This helps us avoid the problem of idolising Nietzsche by forcing us to think in the now and the very near future. We are therefore not turning our activity into a form of passive nihilism that dreams of a distant future where wonders may occur, but stamping the urgency of both time and Nietzsche's own words on the problem itself.

2. **A *trans-Nietzschean* approach provides a new contemporary engagement with the idea of both nihilism and ubermensch, whilst looking *beyond* Nietzsche.**

In order to survive nihilism as understood in contemporary society, we must not only reject many classical and contemporary ideas of ubermensch, but also many facets of the Nietzschean narrative of overcoming. With many of the postmodern thinkers choosing to reject overcoming, we now understand nihilism more in terms of a problem with no grand solution, instead providing only short-term, or micro-truths and answers. This can only be made possible with a weakening of semiocapitalism that allows *us* to dictate ascribed value, rather than the system of capitalism itself. By thinking *trans-Nietzschean*, we have moved beyond understandings of ubermensch as both a mystical surrogate for god, and beyond repetitions of a form of perfect human as understood in the National Socialist and transhuman sense, instead opting for an understanding that engages the fabric of contemporary technological capability.

Whilst superintelligent AI as ubermensch may appear alarming on first impression, it acts to highlight precisely the importance of applying historical ideas and theory to real-world developments in the present. Nietzsche's ubermensch is both time and space dependent, so to realise it requires the application of cutting edge developments not only within philosophy, but also beyond philosophy. The rise of new forms of technology dominate our being, from social media through to the ways in which we transfer capital and credit, and the ways our food is produced and our lives are maintained. By engaging with the concept of the technologies

themselves, and coupling them with ways of understanding being as rendered in light of what intelligence may be itself, embracing ideas of superintelligent AI as ubermensch provides a critical solution that is truly situated in the now.

3. **It opens avenues for new dialogues towards new understandings of both Nietzsche and of selfhood/being in light of contemporary bio/techno-semiocapitalism. It also provides new grounds for questioning being and technology, particularly AI and the degrees in which 'the human' remains part of 'humanity'.**

Leading from interrogating urgency we believe that the urgency outlined provides sufficient ground for opening avenues for new types of dialogue to take place. Whilst this thesis was limited in scope due to wordcount, it provides a gateway to new forms of thinking that might otherwise have not been discovered. The interrogation of urgency itself makes the problem both very real and very clear: technology and capital underpin being in the now, so exploring being in light of and beyond technology and capital could lead to new ways to understanding not just technology, capitalism and nihilism, but what it means to 'be' in the present.

*5.2b Objections and Weaknesses*

- **The exclusion of important thinkers has impacted on the wider problem**

Given the word constraints it was inevitable that some content would be overlooked

in favour of a tighter argument. The omission of important figures (perhaps most importantly for this thesis, Heidegger) means that some areas might lack developments that could improve our arguments. Whilst passing references are made, and many of the thinkers used refer to Heidegger in their own work (exploring Heideggerian understandings of being, technology and nihilism), there is no direct engagement. However, the possibility remains for this work to be undertaken.

- **The solution is not a pleasant one**

We accept that the idea of superintelligent AI as ubermensch does not have positive connotations for common understandings of what we might call the human, nor for what this might mean for humanity. However, the idea of ubermensch itself is alien and not altogether pleasant when we peel away salvation narratives and repetitions of a happy ending. In understanding this new form of ubermensch, we also understand the limitations on the human, and the fact we devalue ourselves in the process. Thinking *trans-Nietzsche* has placed value within a value-generating entity that doesn't adhere with common, or even positive conclusions for the human.

As such, embracing ubermensch raises new questions about the legitimacy of Nietzsche's concept as a whole. If we refuse to embrace ubermensch, then are we merely painting ourselves as village atheists, or does the rejection of the Nietzschean ideal empower us to a greater degree? We must remember though that Nietzsche did not wish to be considered an idol, so we accept rejecting ubermensch

based upon this fact. Nietzsche is not infallible, nor is his thinking. We must also remember that the passage of time has altered the ways in which we view the world. Nietzsche's ubermensch might offer greater potential with an endless timeframe in which to develop, but Nietzsche himself predicted 200 years of nihilism before its rise. In utilising this timeframe we have shown just how unpleasant and ugly catalytic events can be.

- **Thinking *trans-Nietzsche* is not enough as we are still limited by Nietzsche's place in history**

To think beyond Nietzsche requires us to think beyond *his* problem. If we fixate on the Nietzschean problem; the static understanding of Nietzsche's nihilism; the problem of Nietzsche himself, then we aren't looking *beyond* but gazing at Nietzsche. The question isn't whether any one mode of thought about nihilism and ubermensch is more alien than the other, rather than the thought itself is what is alien. Proposing ubermensch that has detrimentally negative outcomes to the human does not necessarily imply a flaw in logic, but rather that ubermensch might be the flaw. Whether we defiantly reclaim the last man and turn it into our own, or opt for self-destruction in the face of superintelligent AI ubermensch, nihilism still remains. In turn, it is ourselves that fall victim to alienation, to being alien in a world of baseless symbols that keep us at arms-length from any true sense of universal connection. Thinking *trans-Nietzschean* therefore might offer grounds to ruminate on the external, path of the observer, etc.

We suggest therefore that the largest limitation is simply not knowing what Nietzsche may make of this. Whether Nietzsche would have expanded on the concept should he not have fallen ill, we will never know. We also note that his guarded secrecy of meaning has led to multiple problems in interpretation, and in turn to a degree of idolisation of Nietzsche himself – precisely what he hoped to avoid. Whilst Nietzsche's ubermensch might promise the earth, it is not an earth that we can comprehend. Ubermensch as AI superintelligence not only provides potential existential risk for the human as a species, but also acts in a way so alien and other as to almost negate the experience of the human in any way. We also note that the theories outlined here are not the only possibility for ubermensch, but one probable solution that we happen to think most fitting, given the theories outlined.

*5.4: Final Thoughts*

There is an irony in interrogating Nietzsche and proposing a solution to ubermensch at the end of 200 years of nihilism. We've opened the doors for as many new questions as we have provided answers. We remain fastened to the tightrope between animal and ubermensch, teetering somewhere in the middle, only now the distance between the poles has grown alongside us. As postmodernity developed, so too has technology, capitalism and the faculties of thought. We are increasingly subjected to a disregard for truth in favour of convenience, alignment and scapegoating, Whether superintelligent AI might answer the problems of nihilism and ubermensch is perhaps of less importance than the radicalisation of thought that our interrogations have uncovered: that we cannot limit being to merely

human and animal bodies, and that in order to address the problems of the now, we must look to the future by thinking beyond ourselves towards the universality of the things that dictate us.

# GLOSSARY

AI – Artificial Intelligence

*BGaE* – Beyond Good and Evil

D&G – Deleuze and Guattari

*EH* – Ecce Homo

*Sim et Sim* – Simulacra and Simulation

*TBoT* – The Birth of Tragedy

*TCOW* – The Case of Wagner

*TSZ* – Thus Spoke Zarathustra

*TGS* – The Gay Science

*TOI* – Twilight of Idols

*TWTP* – The Will to Power

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