

Nihilist Media and its Mapping Impulse

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Nihilism, a doctrine that holds existence meaningless and stands for ‘the radical repudiation of value, meaning and desirability’ (Nietzsche 1968: 7), is crucial to understanding media geographies in the contemporary. Our discussions of nihilism rely on Nietzsche’s analyses of nihilism and his distinction between active and passive nihilism. We also draw on Deleuze’s readings of nihilism in Nietzsche philosophy. However, we retain Nietzsche’s distinction of passive and active nihilism rather than Deleuze’s typologies of negative and reactive nihilism. Our deliberations on the dialectics of nihilism and media geographies draw also on Diken’s (2009) discussions of the articulations of nihilism (hedonism, escapism, despair).

Following Nietzsche, one may distinguish between two senses of nihilism - passive and active. Passive nihilism stands for ideas and beliefs relating to “another world, a super-sensible world (God, essence, the good, the truth)” (Deleuze 1963: 147). Passive nihilism negates the earth, life and humanity in the name of metaphysical ideals and otherworldly values. Passive nihilism *invents* “a world beyond, as a true world to pass sentence on *this* whole world of becoming” (Nietzsche 1968: 12-13, emphasis added). Central to passive nihilism is “the idea of values superior to life”. It seeks a meaning in events, life and the world, etc., “that is not there”. Passive nihilism ascribes existence “some sort of unity, some form of ‘monism’: this faith suffices to give man a deep feeling of being dependent on, some whole that is infinitely superior ... (ibid.). Passive nihilism devalues “life in the name of higher values”, which implies the denial of this world and life by juxtaposing it to values and transcendental worlds (Deleuze 1963:148). Put differently, passive nihilism is the realm of *credo* – otherworldly values, beliefs, norms and ideals. As such, passive nihilism accepts what *is*, existing state of affairs, whatever is, is ordained and everything is as it should be. In the words of Badiou (2009: 331), “the passive nihilist is already a realist, packing his bags for the posts and places of social fate”.

In contrast, active nihilism disavows supernatural beliefs and values. It stands passive nihilism on its head, so to speak. “The active nihilist inherits nothing. *He never believed*, and therein lies all his strength ... he is a traveller without luggage (Badiou 2009: 330). Hence, active nihilism “valorizes only itself” (ibid). In as much as active nihilism “includes disbelief in any metaphysical world” (Nietzsche 1968: 13), it signifies the “devaluation of higher values” *per se* – denial of God, the good or the truth (Deleuze 1963: 148). Henceforth “... man takes the place of God: ... progress, happiness for all and the good of the community; the God-man, the moral man, the truthful and social man. These are the new values that are recommended in place of higher values, these are the new characters that are proposed in place of God” (ibid: 151). Yet, the rise of secularism does not imply the end of nihilism since escapism can take non-religious forms as well. Nietzsche traces the historical roots of science in the religious belief. For “Christianity is but Platonism ‘for the people’ ” (1966: 193) and as such “modern science”, is a species of theology, “a shadow of the Christian God” (Haase 2008: 107). Hence, “faith in the categories of reason is the cause of nihilism”, Nietzsche reminds us (1968: 13). Why? “We have measured the value of the world according to categories *that refer to a purely fictitious world*” (ibid., emphasis original).

To Nietzsche, upholding utility maximization as the supreme value epitomizes nihilism (1966, 396). The credo of utility maximization subordinates all other values, nature and life itself, to the narrow calculus of economic profit and gain. Nihilism is, thus, inimical to nature and life, to the human and non-human alike. Nature, life and humanity become mere addenda to the logic of the market, credit and speculation. Active nihilism is the realm of *credit*, debt and speculation.

Common to active and passive nihilism is the devaluation of humanity and life. Whereas passive nihilism denigrates life and humanity in the name of world to come, values without a world (Diken 2009), active nihilism devalues humanity and life by negating all higher values, a world without values (ibid.). In both variants of nihilism, life and humanity lack intrinsic worth, are bereft of value and existence is devoid of meaning, purpose and significance.

The media are central to current articulations of nihilism and this paper tries to map the various articulations of nihilism in the contemporary media landscape.

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Richard Ek, Ph.D. in human geography in 2003, is a researcher and senior lecturer at the Department of Service Management, Lund University, Sweden. In his Ph.D. he studied how the spatial visions regarding the future of the transnational Öresund region was used as a discursive tool to "steer" the societal development in a certain (neoliberal) direction as the same time as the same spatial visions excluded alternative geographies. Thereafter he paid some attention on how political and economic interests strive to create a "Europe on speed", that is, through different infrastructure projects build a "dromocratic Europe".

In his postdoctoral research he investigates how the inhuman gains terrain in society, and how inhuman figures expresses what an extrapolated capitalism demands in order to be able to continue its destructive and nihilistic trajectory. When you think about it, the experience-seeking, sophisticated and resourceful tourist that all cities try to attract, is that figure not quite similar to the eloquent vampire popularized through motives and TV-series? Another, more or less familiar figure is the service worker, sometimes depicted as a robot sometimes dehumanized in another ontological direction - turned into a slave (service/servus as Latin for slave). The inhuman in different guises, as ontological figures, imagines a post-political society in which some are bound to always be an advanced tourist destined to consume themselves into nihilistic oblivion and others are bound to reduce their humanness as objectified service workers, reduced to a slave-like service class.

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