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# Situating the Web of the Necro-Techno Complex

## The Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno

### Abstract

Performance art provides a vital arena for public critical discourse, as for the most part it remains beyond the usurpations of the capitalist art market. In this reflective and critical article, I approach my own performance art as an embodied research methodology which informs the performer as much as the audience. Over eight years, and in varied art spaces and public streets, I presented many performances as live 'services' of my fictitious church, the Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno. This article describes my satirical portrayal of the way that Silicon Valley technology corporations have adapted the 'salvation narrative' to proclaim a futurity of liberation. I argue that such salvation narratives instrumentalize the notion and practice of faith, which extends the history of extractive, exploitative colonialism, from the Doctrine of Discovery to the present day. I analyze how the practices of data brokers such as Facebook, Google, and others, which form the global apparatus of surveillance capitalism, have consolidated power and knowledge to control the behavior and reality of human populations. In the process of achieving ubiquitous saturation, they are converting biological life across the globe into a necropolitical extrajudicial colony. This twenty-first century techno colonialism is the Necro-Techno Complex, a ruthless intensification of exploitation, domination, and control. My performances as high priestess of the Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno incite critical public discourse about such domination and control, and foster resistance to the Necro-Techno Complex.

Christian monarchies and states of Europe in the fifteenth and later centuries assume[d] and exert[ed] conquest rights and dominance over non-Christian indigenous peoples in order to take over and profit from their lands and territories. The overall purpose of these efforts was to accumulate wealth by engaging in unlimited resource extraction, particularly mining, within the traditional territories of indigenous nations and peoples.

—Tonya Gonnella Frichner, “Impact on Indigenous Peoples of the International Legal Construct Known as the Doctrine of Discovery, which has served as the Foundation of the Violation of their Human Rights”

We are entering a new era. I call it 'the Singularity.' It's a merger between human intelligence and machine intelligence that is going to create something bigger than itself. It's the cutting edge of evolution on our planet.

—Ray Kurzweil, *After the Singularity: A Talk with Ray Kurzweil*

We kill people based on metadata.

—General Michael Hayden, *The Price of Privacy: Re-Evaluating the NSA*

By amplifying and distorting the spectacular claims of modern prophets, the Reverend of Nano Bio Info Cogno exposed pervasive illusions about the potential of technology to bring about salvation.

—Eben Kirksey, *The Multi-Species Salon*

## Introduction

The public entered a dirty, cramped attic of a former industrial site in Winnipeg, Canada on May 25, 2013. They had been invited to a free service of the visiting Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno (Church of NBIC). Loose boards covered the floor; seemingly, anyone could easily fall through. After the audience was seated closely on either side of a central aisle, the doors were locked. Dressed in silver body suits, with the Church of NBIC cross (see Figure 8) tattooed on their foreheads, co-performers Anuj Vaidya and Erika Hannes entered and made their way down the aisle, chanting in techno-Sanskritic tongues. They demanded that the public stand, turn on their smart phones, and document everything. When they reached the front, Vaidya and Hannes turned on a Gothic soundtrack of electronic voices chanting the mantra of *nano bio info cogno*.<sup>1</sup>

As the soundtrack began, I entered chanting along with our mantra. Veiled as the holy one, I held a tablet displaying our logo high above my head, and had tattoos of the Church of NBIC cross on my forehead and both hands. I reached the front, littered carelessly with computers, tablets, smart phones, and electrical wiring, and intoned in a soft authoritarian voice: “Welcome to the Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno. I am the Messiah, and you are here for your salvation. Your meatware is disgusting, you are becoming extinct, repent your analogue limitations, upload your consciousness, and join the only meaningful religion left!”



*Figure 1. The Entrance of the Messiah. Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno service at Atomic Center, Winnipeg, Canada. Photograph by Milena Lye. 2013.*

Over the next forty-five minutes, I was ringleader of a cultish interactive experience echoing the promises of deliverance to be provided by technology. Vaidya and Hannes were introduced as roving ministers—he from Bangalore, she from Mexico City—joining me to share the gospel from their regions. I centered this performance on a Coca-Cola advertisement released in May of 2013 that showed a healing of the historic conflict between Pakistan and India through Skype-enabled Coca-Cola machines (The Coca-Cola Company 2013). This three-minute advertisement showed Indian and Pakistani customers putting money into a Coke machine that not only connected them via Skype between Lahore, Pakistan and New Delhi, India, but also gave them a refreshing, cold drink. The connection and drinking of Coca-Cola led to explosively joyous and exuberant celebrations of multicultural curiosity and tolerance that magically erased the bloody history and conflict between Pakistan and India. As the Hindus and Muslims drank Coca-Cola, they danced happily, while inscribing the faces of others visible through Skype with glowing, lit-up hearts.

In this instance of my ongoing project, the Church of NBIC, I positioned myself as a decadent cult leader, powerful enough to only need to speak in seductive whispers. With malevolent charm, and the help of Hannes and Vaidya, I commanded audience members to the front, where I blessed their devices, put temporary tattoos on their hands and foreheads, told them their meat bodies disgusted me, and outright rejected them. For about eight minutes, I refused to interact with them physically, and had the audience communicate with me via texts or calls on my phone, so I wouldn't have to look at or acknowledge them.



*Figure 2. The Unveiling of the Messiah. Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno service at Atomic Center, Winnipeg, Canada. Photograph by Milena Lye. 2013..*

The audience became increasingly involved. They brought up their electronic devices for blessings, in some cases crawling forward on their hands and knees. The majority of the audience chanted along with our mantras and came forward to photograph me from up close. Some audience members knelt at my feet, allowed themselves to be stamped with temporary tattoos, confessed their guilt about not being good enough technology consumers, and begged forgiveness. As I condemned a woman who came to the front on her knees to confess she owned an obsolete cell phone rather than a smart phone, the audience chanted at her in sing-song unity: “meatware! meatware!” After her confession, I provided absolution by having her chant “Hail Bill Gates” ten times, and Vaidya and Hannes affixed a temporary tattoo to her forehead. As I exhorted her to buy a smart phone, she exclaimed loudly to the room, “I feel alive!”

Other audience members spontaneously chanted in binary code, licked my legs, drank the Coca-Cola my feet were bathed in, and threw their cell phones at me. One even tried to run out of the room screaming in guilt, as he had an obsolete pay-per-use phone. I had never performed in that city, knew almost no one there, had not seeded the audience with performers on any script, and was sharply reminded by the intense response how techno-capitalism interpellates the general public.





Figure 3. Audience member being tattooed with a temporary tattoo of the Church logo. Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno service at Atomic Center, Winnipeg, Canada. Photograph by Erika Hannes. 2013.

The Church of NBIC is a fictitious church I launched in 2006 to antagonize the messianic rapture underlying the depoliticized discourse promoted by emerging technology corporations. I performed Apple, Google's and Amazon's salvation narratives in order to expose how they obscure entrenched racist, sexist, and classist exceptionalism. Over the eight years of the project I did numerous live performances and street theatre, created digital images, a tract, a Second Life installation<sup>2</sup>, wrote essays in different media outlets, and offered chapel installations that included video, audio, altars, pews, and interactive electronic confessionals. I also attended NBIC convergences, conferences and 'unconferences' held by the Foresight Nanotechnology Institute and the Computer Science Museum in Silicon Valley.

In this essay, I unpack how this fictitious church satirized the hubris of a corporate techno-theocracy that is intensifying colonization, extraction, and global inequity. I name this intensifying brutality and predation the Necro-Techno Complex. It is twenty-first century techno-colonialism, predicated on the extractive logics of colonialism introduced by fifteenth-century Christendom through the Doctrine of Discovery and the Framework of Dominance.

This essay extends Achille Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics" to the emerging technology sector. In *Necropolitics*, Mbembe proposes the use of the words *life* and *death* to redirect the philosophical discourse of modernity from abstractions about "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence" (Mbembe 2003, 14). In twenty-first century techno-colonialism, the most powerful technology corporations based in Silicon Valley, including Amazon, Microsoft, Apple, Google/Alphabet, Intel, Facebook, and

Yahoo, have seized biopower<sup>3</sup> from modern states, obliterated sovereignty, and intensified the commodification of all human existence. Political-juridical structures and the right to kill have been restructured, forcing the increasingly powerless global population into a third zone, which Mbembe delineates “between subjecthood and objecthood” as dehumanized, industrial commodities (Mbembe 2003, 26). Though dealing with global communications technologies, my research focus is the Americas, and I will primarily speak about corporations based in the United States.



*Figure 4. Audience member spontaneously drinking the Coca Cola the feet of the Messiah were bathed in. Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno service at Atomic Center, Winnipeg, Canada. Photograph by Janet Sarson. 2013.*

The Necro-Techno Complex is threatening biological life on our planet. It is not because superior machinic artificial intelligence will override inferior biological intelligence<sup>4</sup>, or a projected inability for humans to compete with their own computational creations, or other material scientific problems. It is threatening biological life by turning all biological matter into data for commodification, extraction and profit.



Figure 5. *The Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno on Second Life*. Digital image capture from the personal archive of the author.

## Techno-colonialism

The roots of capitalist technoculture have been decontextualized from the logic in which they are rooted—extraction, enacted through violent colonization—and successfully metaphorized as discovery and salvation. Indigenous scholar Tonya Gonnella Frichner, of the North American Onondaga Nation, points to the 1455 papal bull *Romanus Pontifex* as providing the conceptual structure that legalized and legitimized the domination of non-Christian people by monarchies of the Latin Christian Church. This document established the ‘Doctrine of Discovery,’ to which Frichner adds “the Doctrine of *Christian* Discovery” (Frichner 2010, 7). The doctrine established, in international law, the legality of “unlimited resource extraction, particularly mining, within the traditional territories of indigenous nations and peoples” (Frichner 2010, 8). In the colonization of the Americas, the Latin Church, the Pope, European monarchs, and conquistadores utilized the Doctrine of Discovery to enslave, torture and exterminate human and non-human worlds for resource extraction. This method, combining discovery, missionaries, salvation, and resource extraction, has been repeated throughout history to execute resource extraction at whatever cost.

Frichner analyzes the extension of the Doctrine of Discovery into a ‘Framework of Dominance’ in the 1455 *Romanus Pontifex*, which granted colonial powers divine rights, in perpetuity, to “‘grant,’ ‘discover,’ ‘subdue,’ ‘acquire’ and ‘possess,’ and permanently control non-Christian indigenous people” and their resources (Frichner 2010, 11). The genocidal effects across the Americas of this Framework of Dominance, which is embedded in colonization, has been extensively documented in numerous publications.<sup>5</sup>

Present day discourses and practices of the U.S. techno-capitalist sector utilize these same concepts of discovery and salvation to justify extraction. These logics

remain rooted in Westernized faith-based attitudes and pave the way for a tacit acceptance of the discovery, acquisition, and possession of all biological life forms. Merged with Silicon Valley's embrace of American exceptionalism, they reinscribe what Mbembe describes as "narratives of mastery and emancipation, most of which are underpinned by Enlightenment understandings of truth and error" (Mbembe 2003, 19). This has expanded the necropolitical from colonies and enslavement into the global population, far beyond national boundaries or state identities.

When the U.S. National Science Foundation reported in 2005 that a new convergence of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive neuroscience was being made possible by the rapid acceleration of processing capacity in computing, they cautioned that this would "create a major phase change globally in economics and society" (Bainbridge 2005, 2). Technology corporations are seizing the rights to acquire, possess, and dominate biological life through information and communication technologies, genomics, and artificial intelligence, while imposing a necropolitical global state of siege that "does not distinguish between the external and the internal enemy" (Mbembe 2003, 30). As the field of data mining expands exponentially, humans have become the resource, and Frichter's Framework of Dominance is being applied across the globe.

One of the most persistent proponents of discovery and salvation in techno-capitalist culture is the inventor Ray Kurzweil. For decades he has framed technological developments as both the march of progress and a radical paradigm shift. In Kurzweil's thinking, the past does not talk to the future and the future is not connected to the past. The present is rupture. His concept of the Singularity is "a point where this rate of technological progress will be so rapid that it appears to be a rupture in the fabric of human history" (R. Kurzweil 2002). Kurzweil is celebrated for inventing numerous technologies and interfaces, and has received numerous honorary doctorates and awards, including the U.S National Medal of Technology in 1999. He was hired by Google in 2012 to lead engineering. He couches discovery as a "tremendous moral imperative" to help and benefit people across the world (R. Kurzweil 2002), obscuring capitalist commodification, military control, and the damaging history of global aid projects. It is not ironic to him that his help to the world has made him a millionaire. In much of his writing, he defines the human as a biological machine that must overcome physical death and become immortal. Like many technologists in the field, he does not identify as a Christian; however, Judeo-Christian salvation narratives and myths of immortality infect not only his work, but also the broader field.

### **Techno-Theocracy**

I developed the Church of NBIC to directly link Kurzweil's rhetoric of discovery and salvation with the gruesome history of the use of these concepts by the Latin Christian Church. This performance project was inaugurated in April of 2006, at Mills College, in Oakland, California. I was completing my bachelor's degree at Mills, and along with electronic media and programming classes, I took a robotics class. The class offered theorization on robotics alongside practical instruction in programming languages for consumer robots. We were to build and program small robots in the class. Much to my surprise, Kurzweil's *The Age of Spiritual Machines* was one of the assigned readings. This reading, and others—including Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*—were presented



without criticality as benevolent, hopeful, and expansive. Unsurprisingly, the professor also worked part time at Google.



Figure 6. The First Supper of the Singularity. Digital image by the author. Pictured are, from left to right, Ray Kurzweil, Eric Drexler (nanotechnology), Sir Timothy Berners-Lee (world wide web), Alan Turing (computer science), Larry Page (Google), Thomas J. Watson (IBM), Herbert Boyer (recombinant DNA, Genentech), Jerry Yang (Yahoo), Steve Jobs (Apple), Bill Gates (Microsoft), Larry Ellison (Oracle) and James Watson (DNA).

For the debut performance, I appropriated *The Age of Spiritual Machines* as the official Church of NBIC scripture. My intention was to make clear, through satire, the embedded narratives of mastery and domination in the hubris of techno-utopianism. I framed it as a Catholic high mass, wore a robe and a costume-shop Pope's mitre, and had performers Erika Hannes and Katie Stanford join me as altar girls. I wanted to link Papal corruption, colonization, and contemporary techno-capitalism.

I introduced myself as the Pope of the *Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno*, welcoming the audience to our service. Throughout the service I had the audience rise and sit, as many Christian denominations do throughout a mass or church service. The audience cooperatively stood, sat, and moved to the front when requested.

The performance was a parody of a Christian church service:

*We begin today's service with a reading from one of the prophets: Ray Kurzweill, author of our holy book, The Age of Spiritual Machines*  
Please stand.

Evolution has been seen as a billion-year drama that has led inexorably to its grandest creation: human intelligence. The emergence in the early twenty-first century of a new form of intelligence on Earth that can compete with, and ultimately significantly exceed, human intelligence will be a development of greater import than any of the events that have shaped human history. (Kurzweil 1998, 5)

*Please be seated.*

Computers will increasingly appear to have their own personalities, evidencing reactions that we can only label as emotions and articulating their own goals and purposes. They will appear to have their own free

will. They will claim to have spiritual experiences. And people will believe them. (Kurzweil, 1998, 6)

There will be nostalgia for our humble carbon-based roots, but the leap to port our minds to a more capable computing medium will happen gradually but inexorably nonetheless. (Kurzweil, 1998, 126)

*Please stand.*

There will be no mortality. Our immortality will be a matter of being sufficiently careful to make frequent backups. (Kurzweil 1998, 128-129)

*Please repeat after me:*

*There will be no mortality.*

*Our immortality will be a matter of being sufficiently careful to make frequent backups.*

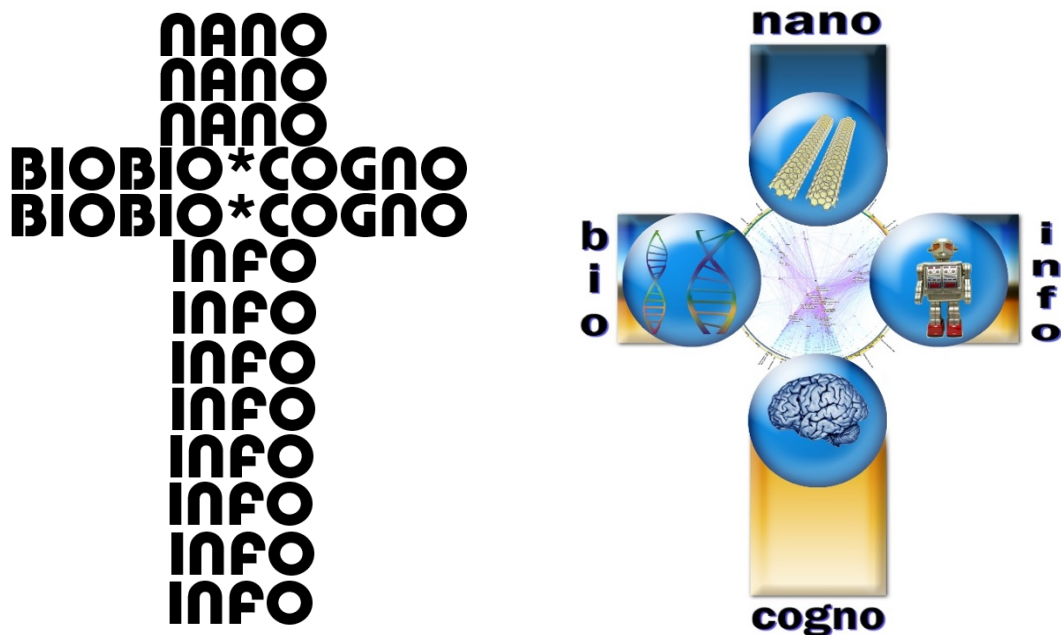


Figure 7, 8. Logos of the Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno. Left, 2006. Right, 2007-2014. Digital images by the author

These excerpts reflect not only Kurzweil's view, but also a view that was popular across Silicon Valley in the late 1990s. This view asserts that the grand culmination of a billion years of evolution is the rational white male who has discovered a technological process to transcend his own mortality.<sup>6</sup> I created the image, *First Supper of the Singularity* (Figure 6), to echo this ahistorical, mythologized, and gendered construction. The Church project was further informed by previous research and interviews on gender in the techno-sphere, which I had conducted as part of creating the live performance *Computers Are A Girl's Best Friend* (2004-2009) and publishing *Cyber.Labia: Gendered Thoughts and Conversations in Cyber Space*<sup>7</sup> (Pilar 2005).

I continued:

*Please be seated. Let us turn now to another of the prophets.*

In the next section, I shared excerpts from a video interview of a technologist I met at a Foresight Nanotechnology Institute event, as the words of one of our prophets. Before our interview, I had explained to him that I do satire, and showed him

*Cyber.Labia*. In his interview, he spoke of biotechnology, evolution, and posthumanism in a manner that reflects the hubris of the field: “I think it’s quite a claim to suggest that we’re the most the universe can provide, ok, basically if you say that there won’t be a post-human, that there won’t be something better than us, then you’re sort of saying we’re the top.” He went on further to explain that the creation of intelligent beings—previously done with gonads—would now be possible through technology.

In the section following the video of the prophet, I called the audience, who I referred to as parishioners, forward for communion. They were asked to ingest a radio frequency identity tag as “*partaking from the great offerings humanity has designed*”, and thus join the cyborg revolution. At least 25 audience members did indeed rise, come down the aisles, and take in the RFID tags, which were in reality small sugar free candies.

As communion wound down, I shared a sermon. I railed against then-president Bush for his fight against stem cells due to bizarre and erroneous religious beliefs, while condemning all who stand outside of rationality as heretic sheep who don’t understand that science/progress is the only truth.

I then moved upstage for what I called the supreme ritual of the Church of NBIC, which celebrates the end of the biological and reveres the new penetration of the technological era. The altar girls unveiled a machine draped with gold cloth that was at the center of the stage. It was a rented “fucking machine”: a hydraulically driven silicon orifice on gears and drives that moved backwards and forwards at various pre-set rhythms. I strapped on a dildo over my gold lamé bodysuit, and had intercourse with the fucking machine as the singer, Elizabeth August, from the choir of a local Christian church, reverentially sang a retooled version of Amazing Grace:

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
Soon to save our world to be!  
We once were lost, but now are found;  
Saved by technology.*

*'Twas grace that taught our minds to search,  
for truth, science and machines;  
How precious does that grace appear  
With the singularity near!*

*Biological earth shall soon dissolve,  
The sun will cease to shine;  
But Robots born of Robots made,  
Will live forever on.*

*When we’ve been post human for eons,  
Biolife will be forgotten,  
And we shall thank the neural net  
For all it has begotten.*

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
Soon to save our world to be!*

*We once were lost, but now are found;  
Saved by technology.*

*Praise to Kurzweil!!*

I closed the service, welcoming all those present as new members:

*I want to thank you all for joining us in the inaugural celebration, and welcome you as a new member of the Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno. Please stand and join me in the processional as we leave the church. May the spirit of technology be with you always.*

The audience readily participated throughout the performance, rising, sitting, coming forward for communion, and ingesting the RFID tags. When I began the “supreme ritual,” many audience members burst into laughter, applause, and loud exclamations. A smaller segment of the audience exited the concert hall. When I spoke to audience members outside afterwards, many that stayed expressed discomfort and disturbance over their self-described addiction to the “connection” and novelty of their devices. Many that had exited were offended by the juxtaposition of *Amazing Grace* and the staged action. I purposively chose an action that was drastic, rude, and potentially alienating to rupture the profound interpellation into the salvation narratives provided by the technology sector.<sup>8</sup>

In *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (1999) and *A World Without Women: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Science* (1993), science historian David Noble shows a synergetic relationship between the Latin Christian church and technology. He writes that Christian millennial ideas on salvation through the second coming of Christ required an improvement of earth through applying technology. When the earth was improved enough, the ground would be laid for Christ to return and reign on earth for 1000 years (Noble 1999, 21-34). Included in Noble’s list of millennial Christians are Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, Charles Babbage, Edward Teller, the rocket scientist Werner von Braun, the aerodynamicist and first operational chief of NASA Hugh Dryden, and two term NASA administrator James Fletcher. He also reflects on the fact that the first broadcast from the 1968 Apollo 8 mission to the moon was the first ten lines of the Book of Genesis (Noble, 1999, p. 137). Rather than a division between technology and religion, millennial ideas pervade the field.

Millennial Christians of the Latin church, colonialism, and the necropolitical are bound with 21<sup>st</sup> century techno-colonialism by the utilization of the salvation narrative to obscure gross extraction. Although Kurzweil couches this in the scientific terms of an evolutionary conversion of dumb mass to intelligence throughout the universe, he argues that salvation is a central element of human activity and progress. His evolutionary narrative is built on the human desire for faith, salvation, and transcendence: “[W]e can view this inclination for transcendence in its evolutionary perspective as a useful survival tool in our ecological niche, a special niche for a species that is capable of modeling and extending its own capabilities” (Kurzweil and More, 2002). Kurzweil’s use of an evolutionary perspective to justify extraction perpetuates the elements of social Darwinism and widespread European colonial extermination examined by Sven Lindqvist in *Exterminate All the Brutes* (Lindqvist 1996).



## The Predatory in the Necro-Techno Complex

The Necro-Techno Complex is built on a ruthless intensification of the consolidation of power and knowledge to control the behavior and reality of populations. Here I analyze two forms that this takes. The first is through practices of “big data” that nullify social and political sovereignty. The second is through Saskia Sassen’s concept of expulsion as emergent since the 1980s in predatory capitalism.

It is imperative to accurately comprehend the extent and velocity of the adoption of information and communication technologies across the world. Business economist Shoshana Zuboff comprehensively explains the steps that have led to present day ubiquity: initially, few individuals understood how these technologies worked; the public trusted the companies without an awareness that the systems being developed held undetectable surveillance capacities; within a very short time frame they were institutionalized across the labor force and ubiquitous in the social arena. Once ubiquitous, fatalism about loss of control set in due to “the rapid buildup of institutionalized facts—data brokerage, data analytics, data mining, professional specializations, unimaginable cash flows, powerful network effects, state collaboration, hyperscale material assets, and unprecedented concentrations of information power” (Zuboff 2015, 85). Zuboff points out that most users have never understood that as computers produce data, they are recording data.

The velocity with which ubiquity was reached is astonishing. In 1995, less than 1% of the world’s population was online. Within ten years the figure was 15.8% and one billion people had internet access at home. Five years later, the second billion was reached, and four short years after that, the third billion (Internet Live Stats 2017). This is an astronomical adoption of incredibly complex systems – with little end-user expertise – worldwide. Internet trackers estimate that there are presently 50 billion devices connected to the internet (Internet Live Stats 2017). Each one of these devices can potentially gather data.

Zuboff’s recent work on “surveillance capitalism” analyzes big data as a technology that not only predicts human behavior for marketing, but can control human behavior. Her recent articles on Google, Facebook, and surveillance provide a road map of how computing moved into the reality business under the Framework of Dominance. “Facebook’s evident interest in mastering the mechanisms of emotional contagion, like Google’s glasses, self-driving cars, or investments in everything from the wired home to drones and satellites share this purpose: to influence and shape human behavior along the lines that feed their bottom line” (Zuboff 2014a). It is not control of behavior while engaging in virtual reality, cyber experiences, or the online you. It is control of “the digital you as well as the actual you. The scene is changing from virtual reality to, well, reality” (Zuboff, 2014b).

There are numerous actors beyond Google and Facebook working with artificial intelligence to modify human behavior. In 2016, 122 surveillance companies were registered in the United States (Privacy International 2016, 27), varying from the unfamiliar “Verint, NICE Systems, Qosmos, Trovicor, Hacking Team, NeoSoft, VasTech, Palantir” to the familiar “AT&T, Vodafone, Comcast” (Privacy International 2016, 17). I will briefly discuss Palantir corporation and Cambridge Analytica to concretize how the surveillance society is seizing biopower from modern states, obliterating sovereignty, and intensifying commodification of human existence.

Palantir, founded partly with funding from the CIA in 2004, counts among its clients the NSA, the CIA, the FBI, and other branches of the US Defense Department. Co-founder Peter Thiel, with a current estimated worth of \$3 billion, also co-founded Paypal, was the first outside investor in Facebook and sits on their board, and invests in numerous other Silicon Valley companies (Chafkin 2016). He donated \$1.25 million to the Trump campaign and joined the Trump transition team.

Palantir corporation has created the data integration and analysis system XKEYSCORE, which secretly collects and analyzes “emails, chats, and web-browsing traffic, pictures, documents, voice calls, webcam photos, web searches, advertising analytics traffic, social media traffic, botnet traffic, logged keystrokes, computer network exploitation targeting, intercepted username and password pairs, file uploads to online services, Skype sessions, and more” (Biddle 2017). The average user, who is not doing anything illegal and therefore thinks they have nothing to hide, is unaware of the extent of data being collected. They have not given consent and do not understand how easy it is now to run analytics on this data, as “XKEYSCORE makes all of this as searchable as a hotel reservation site” (Biddle 2017).

Data gathering by corporations for consumer exploitation is quickly being redeployed to identify and attack oppositional social actors, including human rights workers, lawyers, political figures and activists. Along with tracing the use of French data tracking technology in torture and human rights abuses in Libya and Syria, Privacy International reports that in Bahrain, “school administrator and human rights activist Abdul Ghani al Khanjar was tortured while being confronted with transcripts of his text messages and details of his personal communications” (Privacy International 2016, 40). This is devastating to the possibilities of human rights organizing through oppositional social movements, and threatens democracy projects worldwide. Predictably, Palantir co-founder Thiel articulated his view on democracy projects in his 2009 essay on the need for libertarians to escape from politics into new territories: “I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible” (Thiel, 2009).

I now turn to Cambridge Analytica, the data analytics company written about extensively in relation to the 2016 U.S. election and Brexit campaigns. One of their larger stakeholders is hedge fund billionaire Robert Mercer, major investor in the *Breitbart* website and the largest donor to the Trump electoral campaign. Investigative reporter Carole Cadwalladr has been researching links between Cambridge Analytica, AggregateIQ, the SCL Group, Palantir, Departments of Defense in the United States and Britain, Facebook datasets, Google data, algorithms and consumer datasets from shopper loyalty cards to credit profiles. She writes in the Guardian: “Cambridge Analytica makes the astonishing boast that it has psychological profiles based on 5,000 separate pieces of data on 220 million American voters—its USP is to use this data to understand people’s deepest emotions and then target them accordingly” (Cadwalladr 2017).

Practices of understanding and manipulating target behavior are not new. The history of psychological behavior modification includes propaganda, military ‘psyops’ (psychological operations), behavior targeting, messaging operations, data microtargeting, psychographics, and bio-psycho-social profiling. What is new is the use of artificial intelligence to automate and perform massive data analysis rapidly. Rooted in military strategies, this has scaled mass propaganda efforts into widespread information warfare on the general public.

In its materials, Cambridge Analytica purports to use artificial intelligence to trawl through Facebook profiles, where the public freely shares information. The dangers of this use of artificial intelligence systems on social media platforms are articulated by Cambridge University's Psychometric Centre Director John Rust: "With this, a computer can actually do psychology, it can predict and potentially control human behaviour... It's how you brainwash someone. It's incredibly dangerous. It's no exaggeration to say that minds can be changed. Behaviour can be predicted and controlled.... People don't know it's happening to them." (Cadwalladr 2017).

The surge of 'fake' news and social bots have successfully derailed reasoned discourse into overhyped sequences of conspiracies. Jonathan Albright, Director of Research at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, researches current network-based information warfare tools, including viral sharing and behavioral micro targeting. He ran data analytics on the networks and identified Facebook Custom Audiences, Facebook Domain Insights, Facebook SDK, Facebook Pixel, Google Universal Analytics, Adblade, and Wordpress automation, aka WP Daily Activity, as such warfare tools (Albright 2017). His research reflects that these corporations are providing the means to change behavior.

Bio-psycho-social profiling is already impacting election outcomes. Political hacker for hire Andrés Sepúlveda, now in prison, claims to have worked on presidential campaigns in "Nicaragua, Panama, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Venezuela" (Jordan Robertson, Michael Riley, and Andrew Willis 2016). Sepúlveda used data technologies to hack cell phones and email accounts, spoof and clone websites, install spyware, do remote digital interception, break encryption, and steal campaign data, documents, and databases. He manipulated social media to spread disinformation by creating a program that ran a "virtual army of fake Twitter Accounts. The software let him quickly change names, profile pictures and biographies to fit any need" (Jordan Robertson, Michael Riley, and Andrew Willis 2016). His greatest insight was how easy it is to manipulate election outcomes by spreading disinformation on social media sites. Though Sepúlveda's methods are illegal, one can turn to Jared Kushner's licit account of how "message tailoring, sentiment manipulation and machine learning" were used to win the Trump campaign in his 2016 interview with Forbes magazine. (Bertoni 2016)

To return to extraction, Zuboff utilizes it as a new paradigm in capitalism without addressing how coloniality and modernity impact the processes she is describing. Her writing on extraction, though insightful and revealing of power dynamics and the augmenting risk, focuses on the lack of reciprocity, dialogue, or consent between the public and large data brokers such as Google and Facebook. Zuboff argues that the previous phase of capitalism offered institutional reciprocities through the interdependence of employees and customers. She claims that the new data brokers are breaking with this past, stating "Big Other is the sovereign power of a near future that annihilates the freedom achieved by the rule of law" (Zuboff 2015, 81).

To overlook how the rule of law is used to enact violence, and how it upholds the asymmetries of freedom which have existed at the very least since the codification of the Doctrine of Discovery, is to reify the colonial violence that depends on that same rule of law. Frichner describes the initiation of the continuous international legal structure of domination: "The bull *Romanus Pontifex*—along with all other such Vatican documents and royal charters... promote on a global scale a framework of

dominance and the theft of indigenous peoples' lands, territories, and resources, under the disguise of activities that are deemed 'just' and 'lawful'" (Frichner 2010, 13).

Though colonial violence depends on international law, Mbembe focuses on the state of exception of the actual colony, where the purported 'alien' nature of the colonized justifies extra-judicial spatiality beyond the law (Mbembe 2003, 24).

The rule of law continues to be inscribed destructively on black bodies through colonialist claims to white innocence. Feminist scholar Janell Hobson traces how the fictional association of whiteness with innocence rests on black guilt. She describes a "a racial polarity between black guilt and white innocence", recognizing that "this construction of whiteness—and its associations with innocence, purity, and morality—[is] 'fiction' insofar as the prevalence of a 'white guilt' sensibility renders the falsity of white innocence" (Hobson 2012, 67). Settler colonialist claims to innocence have been analyzed by Indigenous scholars; this is most clearly analyzed in Tuck and Yang's 2012 article, *Decolonization is not a Metaphor* (Tuck 2012).

Extraction is not a new paradigm in capitalism, and seeing it that way obscures a much more troubling present. The Necro-Techno Complex successfully mashes economics, technology and faith, to apply extraction to all life on earth. Naïve trust allowed creeping ubiquity, which at this point seems inescapable. One new element is the reduction in the number of beneficiaries and the terrifying increase in a newly symmetrical global suffering that leaves only a 1% techno-theocracy in control and a 99% colonized in extractive subjugation. They are extending the state of siege globally, meeting Mbembe's definition of a "modality of killing that does not distinguish between the external population and the internal enemy. Entire populations are the target" (Mbembe 2003, 30) .

An additional factor is the systemic changes to global economic activity since the 1980s that have transformed the global economy into a predatory capitalist system of expulsion. Sociologist Saskia Sassen has been tracking expulsion of the growing poor, the displaced, the refugees, the imprisoned, the "able-bodied 'surplus populations' warehoused in ghettos and slums" (Sassen 2013, 198). High finance entities are buying metropolitan and rural land, raising real estate prices for homes and rentals across major cities of the globe. The people on this land do not carry enough value as consumers or workers and are rendered surplus: "surplus people – warehoused, displaced, trafficked, reduced to mere laboring bodies and body-organs" (Sassen 2013, 199).

Mbembe analyzes late modern colonial occupation as "vertical sovereignty" where "surveillance is both inward-and outward-oriented" and consists of "control, surveillance, and separation . . . tantamount to seclusion" (Mbembe 2003, 28). Today, data brokers like Google, Facebook, Cambridge Analytica, Palintir, and numerous others obscure their collaborations with global military and intelligence agencies—at times even going to court to publicly protect an individual's privacy. NSA analyst Edward Snowden's leaks have revealed that, rather than instituting constraints on government surveillance, these corporations are quasi-military institutions.

The Necro-Techno Complex is the constellation of information and communication technologies, artificial intelligence, and data gathering and analysis tools that are extending Mbembe's "death-worlds" and "living dead" into new populations across the globe. This framework of global necropolitical dominance, which restructures all of Earth as the colony to subject to ruthless extraction, is sustained by



narratives of salvation derived from the Latin church in the West. This has led me, as a performer, to retire the Church of NBIC after the service described in the introduction above. While articulating the framework of the Necro-Techno Complex, I have shifted my embodied practice to experiments in catalyzing imaginaries of individual and collective agency, most recently through my projects *Enigma Symbiotica* and the *NO!!!BOT*.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Soundtrack created by electronic composer and musician Tara Rodgers.

<sup>2</sup> The Second Life installation was developed with conceptual assistance from Jade Rosina McCutcheon.

<sup>3</sup> Mbembe draws on Foucault's conception of biopower, but finds it insufficient to explain contemporary subjugation. Mbembe extends biopower through further intersections of the state of exception, the state of siege, racism, the colonial plantation, late-modern colonial occupation, and spatiality.

<sup>4</sup> This is most notably argued in Bill Joy's "Why The Future Doesn't Need Us" (*WIRED*, April 1, 2000, accessed 2017, [www.wired.com/2000/04/joy-2/](http://www.wired.com/2000/04/joy-2/)) and in numerous articles, op-eds and interviews with Stephen Hawking, Nick Bostrom and others.

<sup>5</sup> There is an extensive literature on colonial genocide in the Americas. A hemispheric overview is provided in *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*, by David E. Stannard (Oxford University Press, 1993). Definitions of genocide and specificity is provided in *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, edited by Andrew Woolford, and Alexander Laban Hin, Jeff Benvenuto ton (Duke University Press, 2014), and *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (Beacon Press, 2015). An overview of coloniality and slavery is provided in *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean*, by Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson III (second edition, Oxford University Press, 2007). An early chronicle of European colonial extermination is Bartolomé de las Casas' 1552 chronicle, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account* (translated by Herma Briffault, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> All of the life extension and cryonic salespeople I met at NBIC events were men.

<sup>7</sup> *Cyber.Labia: Gendered Thoughts and Conversations on Cyber Space* is available online at <http://prabapilar.com/prabalibro.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Excerpts from this performance are available on youtube at <https://youtu.be/rgxwv3JIGts>.

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### **About the Author**

Praba Pilar is an independent artist and scholar keen on disrupting the contemporary 'cult of the Techno-Logic,' while working on decolonizing initiatives in community. She creates live art, performances, digital and electronic works, participatory workshops, experimental lectures, and publications. Her projects have traveled widely around the world, received numerous awards, and include the *NO!!!BOT*, *Enigma Symbiotica*, *BOT I*, the *Church of Nano Bio Info Cogno*, the *Cyborg Soap Opera*, and the *Nano Sutra of Mathturbation*. Her most recent texts have been published in the journals *Scholar & Feminist Online*, *Lateral Journal of the Cultural Studies Association*, and *Women Eco Artists Dialogue*. She is presently Co-Director of the Hindsight Institute and of Disinterpellation Technologies, has a PhD in Performance Studies and can be visited online at [www.prabapilar.com](http://www.prabapilar.com).