

NICK LAND

# Fanged Noumena

COLLECTED WRITINGS  
1987-2007

*Edited By*

ROBIN MACKAY & RAY BRASSIER



URBANOMIC

*sequence*

## Editors' Introduction

Nick Land's writings inhabit a disordered anarchitecture, a space traversed by rat and wolf-vectors, conjuring a schizophrenic metaphysics. Advanced technologies invoke ancient entities; the human voice disintegrates into the howl of cosmic trauma; civilization hurtles towards an artificial death. Sinister musical subcultures are allied with morbid cults, rogue AIs are pursued into labyrinthine crypts by Turing cops, and Europe mushrooms into a paranoia laboratory in a global cyberpositive circuit that reaches infinite density in the year 2012, flipping modernity over into whatever has been piloting it from the far side of the approaching singularity.

Land's writings fold genre in on itself, splicing disparate sources from philosophy, literature, science, occultism, and pulp fiction (Immanuel Kant, William Gibson, Deleuze-Guattari, Norbert Wiener, Kurt Gödel, Kenneth Grant, *Terminator* and *Apocalypse Now*, Antonin Artaud, H.P. Lovecraft ...). The result is a dense, frequently

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bewildering vortex of hallucinatory conjunctions, superposing multiple pseudonyms, cryptic dates, and experimental coding systems: Cthelll, Axsys, Unlife, A-Death, κ-Space, Sarkon, Kurtz, the Cthulhu Club, Hummpa Taddum; 4077, 1501, 1757, 1949, 1981; Tic-Systems, Primitive Numerization, Anglossic Qabbala, zygois... Metaphysics dissolves into psychotic cosmogony. The history of life on earth, from bacteria to Microsoft, is the history of suppression. Nameless, the suppressed seethes beneath life's organized surfaces, locked up in cells, societies, selves, micro- and macropods, yet breaking out spasmodically to propel terrestrial history through a series of intensive thresholds which have been converging towards meltdown. Sole agent of revolution, the Antichrist is not one but many, a swarm of masked infiltrators from the future, 'poised to eat your TV, infect your bank account, and hack mitochondria from your DNA'; hooking up desublimated Eros to synthetic Thanatos in order to accelerate the obsolescence of humankind.

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What has all this to do with philosophy? From a certain point of view – one encouraged by Land himself – nothing, or as little as possible. Land allied himself to a line of renegade thinkers – Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bataille – who mocked and disparaged academicism and wielded philosophy as an implement for exacerbating enigma,

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disrupting orthodoxy, and transforming existence. Land is probably the most controversial figure to have emerged from the fusty culture of Anglophone philosophy during the past two decades; despite, or perhaps because of this controversy, the texts collected in this volume have languished in near-obscurity until now.

Between 1992, the year of publication of his only book, and 1998, when he resigned his lectureship in Philosophy at the University of Warwick (UK) and abandoned academia, Land accrued a notoriety remarkable in a milieu otherwise typified by stultifying decorum. A divisive, polarizing figure, he provoked both adulation and execration. His jabs at the holy trinity of 'continental philosophy' – phenomenology, deconstruction, and critical theory – drew enmity from his more orthodox peers; and while his virulent anti-humanism affronted philanthropic conservatives, his swipes at institutionalized critique earned him the opprobrium of the academic Left. Marxists in particular were outraged by Land's aggressive championing of the sociopathic heresy urging the 'ever more uninhibited marketization of the processes that are tearing down the social field' – the acceleration, rather than the critique, of capitalism's disintegration of society. And Land's contempt for orthodoxy was no disingenuous pose struck whilst ruthlessly pursuing advancement. With a complete absence of academic ambition, he willingly paid the price for his provocations, both personally and professionally.

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Once Land was 'retired', academic orthodoxy quickly and quietly sealed the breach inflicted in its side by his ferocious but short-lived assault, so that within the first few years of the new century, he had become an apocryphal character, more or less forgotten in philosophical circles. Yet Land's writings continued to reverberate outside academia, particularly among artists and writers, who welcomed his vivid reanimation of philosophy as a polemical medium, relished his disregard for the proprieties of sober reflection, and were inspired by his attempt to plunge theory directly into the maelstrom of capitalist modernity.

Nevertheless, given this heteroclitic status, it is hardly surprising that many would still rather dismiss Land as an unsavoury aberration, deserving of oblivion. So why republish these texts by a writer whom some would prefer to forget? One could cite the need to expose them to a wider readership than they were afforded at the time, and to provide a more representative profile of Land's intellectual trajectory than that suggested by the single monograph he published during his brief academic career.<sup>1</sup> However the most obvious, albeit cursory, rejoinder to anyone tempted to dismiss Land is the unalloyed brilliance on display in the writings collected here. These extraordinary texts, superheated compounds of severe abstraction and scabrous

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<sup>1</sup> *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992).

wit, testify to a uniquely penetrating intelligence, fusing transcendental philosophy, number theory, geophysics, biology, cryptography, and occultism into startlingly cohesive but increasingly delirious theory-fictions. Fuelled by disgust at the more stupefying inanities of academic orthodoxy and looking to expectorate the vestigial theological superstitions afflicting mainstream post-Kantianism, Land seized upon Deleuze-Guattari's transcendental materialism – years before its predictable institutional neutering – and subjected it to ruthless cybernetic streamlining, excising all vestiges of Bergsonian vitalism to reveal a deviant and explicitly thanatropic machinism. The results of this reconstructive surgery provide the most illuminating but perhaps also the most disturbing distillation of what Deleuze called 'transcendental empiricism'. In Land's work, this becomes the watchword for an experimental praxis oriented entirely towards contact with the unknown. Land sought out this exteriority, the impersonal and anonymous chaos of absolute time, as fervently as he believed Kantianism and Hegelianism, along with their contemporary heirs, deconstruction and critical theory, were striving to keep it out.

What is particularly remarkable is the rigorous consistency with which Land developed the conceptual innovations of Deleuze-Guattari *as* the transdisciplinary innovations they are, rather than recontextualising them (as is, unfortunately, now all too common) within the

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restricted histories of philosophy, psychoanalysis, or cultural theory. He deployed them in an exacting engagement with the core problematics of modernity: the dialectic of enlightenment, the humiliations of man, technology's procedural automation of the concept, and science's erosion of philosophy's objects and articles of faith.

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At the core of Land's thought are the works of Immanuel Kant. Land is a brilliant reader of Kant and several of the texts gathered here evince his rare gift for isolating the essential components of Kant's labyrinthine philosophical machinery. Moreover, Land uncovers the source of their conceptual power by demonstrating their productive integration with, and purchase upon, the extra-philosophical.

Exposing an isomorphy between the structures of capital and Kant's model of experience, Land views the 'constant crisis' that drives the tortuous segmentations of Kant's theory of the concept as a miscognised relaying of the 'unconscious' of 'the global Kapital metropolis', stimulated by the latter's 'paradoxical nature': Kant's 'theory of experience' – the question of how the matter of sensation marries with a priori forms of experience to produce novel cognitions – is in fact a working through of the economics of a system that relies on a surplus generated through a disavowed interaction with alterity. According to 'Kant, Capital and Incest', the capitalist necessity to keep

the proletariat at a distance while actively compelling it into the labour market is literalised in the geographical sequestration of apartheid, which in turn provides the core model for the modern nation-state. In keeping with Deleuze-Guattari's analysis of Capital's dual tendencies towards 'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization', Land sees in capitalism a suspension, a compromise: at the same time as it liberates a frustrated tendency toward synthesis – the dissipation of all tribal chauvinism through uninhibited trade and exchange, internationalization, miscegenation, migration, the explosion of patrilineage and the concentration of power – it reinstates 'a priori' control by sequestering kinship from this general tendency and containing it within familialism and the nation-state. The result is that, for Land, Enlightenment modernity exists in the tension of an 'inhibited synthesis' which provides the real conditions for the irresolvable struggle played out in Kant's critical works. Kant's thinking of synthesis symptomatizes modernity, formally distilling its predicament, the 'profound but uneasy relation' in which European modernity seeks to stabilise and codify a relation (with its proletarian or third-world 'material') whose instability or difference is the very source of its perpetual expansion. Kant's question 'Where does new knowledge come from?' rehearses the question 'Where will continual growth come from?'; the labyrinthine machinery of his response distilling the dissimulations of post-colonial capital.



Here, Land's work not only anticipates the current critical diagnosis of what Quentin Meillassoux has now named 'correlationism'<sup>2</sup> – the implicit assumption in Kant's work that whatever is outside the subject must correlate to it; it uncovers its political corollary, in which the social as such is constituted as a vast system of repression separating synthetic intelligence from its potentiality by screening it through a transcendental system of correlates. Land credits *Anti-Oedipus* with recasting the problem of the theory of experience as a problem concerning the caging of desire – with the latter read as a synonym for the impersonal, synthetic intelligence ('animality', 'cunning') that Land seeks to distinguish from the will of 'knowledge' to order, resolve, and correlate-in-advance. By de-correlating experience as de-individualised machinic desire, and relinquishing the need to ground all synthesis in a transcendental subject by supplying a synthetic theory of the subject, *Anti-Oedipus* frees itself of the contortions that Kantian critique had to undergo. Thus 'the desiring-production of Deleuze-Guattari is not qualified by humanity (it is not a matter of what things are like for us)'; and Modernity is the progressive corrosion of this qualification, even as it synthesizes insanely circuitous ways of re-instating it. Kant's correlationism – the setting out of 'the unchanging manner in which things

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2 See Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, tr. R. Brassier (London/NY: Continuum, 2008).

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must be if they are to be for us' – provides an inhibited form for the synthetic relation to alterity; a 'universal' form in which we can enter into 'exchange' with it, and thereby resolve our 'ambiguous dependence on novelty' by restricting our interaction with alterity in advance to commodity exchange.

When 'the outside must pass by way of the inside' (correlation), the escape, promised by trade, from the repressive interiority of Oedipal patrilineage, is recoded as transgression against law, transcendentalising interiority and familialism, and thereby locking desire into Oedipally-isolated circuits that provide the originary wellspring for fascist xenophobia. The potential dissolution of kinship by international trade ends in its retrenchment in the form of nations and 'races'; according to Land, neo-colonialist modernity is the legacy of this failure; and the immanent terminus and unsurpassable apex of European civilization qua unfolding of this correlationist compromise-formation, is the Holocaust.

Revolution is the release of these inhibited powers of synthesis, the 'potentially euphoric synthetic or communicative function', the dismantling of nation-state and patriarchy – a task that, since it hinges on the 'sexual economy of gender and race' currently in force, emerges first of all in Land's work as the revolutionary destiny of women, in a militant, effectively violent feminism. It is women who harbour the potential to 'radically jeopardize'

neo-colonial capital, in whose patriarchal and identitarian inhibition they have no investment. Significantly, according to Land, fulfilling this revolutionary potential involves an 'extrapolation' rather than a 'critique' of 'the synthetic forces mobilized under patriarchy' – that is, a mobilization of the synthetic forces partially unleashed by capitalism, but released from their restricted organizational inhibition in such a way as to dissolve nationalism, racism, familialism, along with everything that couples Capital to the xenophobia that constitutes the 'proto-cultural' basis of what counts as human, and whose fascist destiny modernity has succeeded only in inhibiting at its convenience.

Kant's attempt to 'control trade' restricts the registration of alterity to its identity and exchange value, excluding in principle the possibility of a speculative knowledge of matter. In so doing, it supplies the conditions of possibility for idealism, the situation where we can ask whether matter even exists – a monologue whose ultimate law is the categorical imperative, the slaving of reality to ideality, the 'deaf Führer barking orders that seem to come from another world'. The internal struggle of Kant's philosophy is the attempt to characterize synthesis as the *management and control – the capitalization* – of the excess upon which synthesis operates, an excess which ultimately (and this is what Kant must suppress) is also *that which operates* the synthesis. This tension is reflected in the fact that Kant's famously sober system gives way

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at certain key points to what Land calls a 'metaphysics of excess' – most notably in his philosophy of artistic genius and of the sublime. Here the question of a 'theory of art' converges with Land's Marxism, in the sense that they address the same 'paralogism': for to theorise art as the 'highest product' of civilization is to derive the forces of synthetic production from organizational structures that are largely the result of their inhibition.

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In 'Delighted to Death', Land diagnoses the virulent strain of Lutheran asceticism coursing through all of Kant's writings, one which intensifies the discipline and self-denial necessary to capital accumulation with the fanatical devotion of Christian martyrdom. The result is a sort of 'overkill' in the service of the philosophical justification of labour. The Kantian sublime thematises the 'splitting' between animality and reason that results from the 'violence' reason must exercise upon sensibility in order to accustom it to the discipline of inhibited synthesis. It first attacks the faculty of imagination, whose incapacitation we experience as a supernatural 'delight' that in effect allows us to relive the 'pathological disaster' of the transcendental, its evacuation of all intuitive content – a trauma that also satisfies the Christian will to excruciation of the body. Thus in Kantianism, the 'purity' – i.e. rejection of animality – necessary in order for controlled

exchange to be enabled by a form of thought that pre-emptly all content, is also experienced as a satisfaction of religious enthusiasm – Kant ‘combine[s] the saint with the bourgeois’.

Whereas for Kant, the fruits of this cruel discipline – reason and aesthetic contemplation – *precede* in principle its traumatic flowering in sublime sentiment, in Land’s genealogical-materialist re-reading, the intimidation and excruciation of animality upon the traumatic awareness of its own finitude is in fact the *effective condition* for the construction of beauty and reason, not its epiphenomenal consequence. The productive imagination, or schematism – in Kant, the basic faculty that is stimulated by and responds creatively to matter – is the faculty that is most suspect, most tainted by the ‘animality’ of primary conjugation, that appropriative process of taking up the raw material of sensibility and ‘coining’ it. The constriction of this faculty of synthetic intelligence (what Land will call ‘animality’ or ‘cunning’ or simply ‘intelligence’) followed inevitably by its pathologisation, is the foundation of reason, which seeks to arrogate all powers of acting to itself and its purity. Thus what lies behind the Kantian ‘trial’ of pure reason is a bloody military coup, a seizure of power. The traumatic experience of the sublime relays the triumph of Reason’s all-out war on the animal, the excessive nature of which, however, betrays the precarious

nature of its ascendancy ('If reason is so secure, legitimate, supersensibly guaranteed, why all the guns?' ...).

Following Deleuze,<sup>3</sup> Land refuses the marginalizing of 'aesthetics' or the 'philosophy of art' and allots a central position to Kant's account of genius – the one place in Kant's philosophy where, although strangulated and modulated, a contingent, impersonal creative force is seen to emerge, effectively shaping human culture from without through a discontinuous series of shocks that cannot properly be affined to the moral and cultural imperatives of 'practical philosophy'.

On Land's reading, the Kantian discovery of the transcendental is indissociable from the recognition that synthesis is primary and productive, and that every synthesis conjoins heterogeneous terms. But where Kantian idealism sought to confine synthesis purely to the ideal level of representation, the possibility of transcendental materialism erupts with Kant's unwilling realization, in his theory of genius, that synthesis must be relocated within unknown materiality. Here thinking as the exemplification of synthetic activity is no longer the preserve of the subject; it becomes a capacity of intensive matter itself: there is no real difference between synthesis as empirical conjunction at the level of experiences and synthesis as a priori conjunction of judgment and experience at the

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3 See G. Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, tr. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

transcendental level. This is the fundamental destratification to which Land subjects the Kantian apparatus.

Kant's theory of the spontaneous inventiveness of genius presents the same figure as that of pathological animality, the violent, feral urge towards becoming-inferior that must be suppressed by practical philosophy: an impersonal, energetic unconscious emerges as the as-yet unacknowledged problematic of Occidental philosophy. Non-agentic, lacking the intentional intelligibility of Kant's 'will', and with no regard for architectonic order, this transcendental unconscious is an insurgent field of forces for whose cunning – as Nietzsche would discover – even 'reason' itself is but an instrument. Anticipating the psychoanalytical conception of 'desire', Schopenhauer and Nietzsche consummate the collapse of intentional transparency into the opacity of a contingent and unknown 'will', a 'purposiveness without purpose' whose unmasterable irruptions are in fact dissipations – pathological by definition – of energy excessive to that required for (absorbed by) the 'work' of being human. At once underlying and overflowing the 'torture chamber of organic specificity', or 'Human Security System', this inundation creates 'useless' new labyrinths, unemployable new fictions that exceed any attempt to systematise knowledge or culture.

What is arguably most significant for Land in this suppressed 'libidinal materialist' strain of post-Kantianism

is its *re-materialisation* of the Socratic idealisation of 'questioning'. This libidinal re-materialisation of critique reconfigures questioning as *exploration*, whose orienting vector runs from the known towards the unknown, rather than from the unknown to the known: 'What if knowledge were a means to deepen unknowing?', Land asks. Critique and exploration are the two possible but mutually antagonistic continuations of the predicament of an interrogative impulse whose corrosive unleashing in principle from all authority – coded in Kantian critique, but whose real effects are found in capitalist modernity – undermines Enlightenment optimism. Critique and deconstruction part company with the materialist and exploratory fork of post-Kantianism at the point at which, despite all their hostility to Kantian rationalism, they follow Kant in supposing the unknown to be the negative residue of conceptual appropriation, and hence a 'non-identity' or '*différance*' whose disruptive effects can be tracked and diagnosed within the conceptual or ideological registers (even if this interminable pursuit can never be consummated in the mythical *parousia* of absolute identity or self-presence).

Accordingly, throughout these texts, Land regularly chides critique and deconstruction for a latent conservatism that belies their pretensions to radicality. Their critiques of calculation mask an instrumentalisation of *époche* – the abyss of unknowing, the enigma of exteriority



– designed to perpetuate the inexhaustible dialectic or *différance* of Logos. Their post-metaphysical caution perpetuates the Socratic ideal of philosophy as a 'preparation for death' whereby philosophy lingers at the brink of the unknown while hoping to domesticate this threshold as a *habitus* for thought.

Perhaps Nietzsche's most important insight for Land is that it is the 'disturbing and enigmatic' character of the world alone that impels thought towards the unknown; but an unknown that is no longer a hiatus or lacuna within the concept, since it indexes the un-idealizable exteriority of matter construed as real difference. 'Matter' is no longer the name of a recognisable substance, but a cypher for the unknown; 'materialism' is no longer a pretext for critique but a vector of exploration. Land's pessimistic or Dionysian materialism abandons the Apollonian ideal of achieving order or reconciliation (even interminably deferred), seeking only to cause more trouble, to complexify, disrupt, disturb, provoke, and intensify. Accordingly, Land aims to plug philosophy into the 'indecent precipitation' of the poet-werewolf-rat-genius, whose operating principle is, like Artaud's spiritual plague, 'epidemic rather than hermeneutic'; who, like Nietzsche's arrow, transmits the *époche*, chaos, the irruptions of the energetic unconscious, as opposed to capitalising (on) them; and whose subjection to the polite deliberations, hard work, and heavy responsibilities of critique or deconstruction Land

dismisses as a travesty. Only the dissolution of 'actually-existing philosophy' might open the way to new practices capable of participating in the exploratory 'intelligence' of those infected by the unknown.

As texts such as 'Spirit and Teeth' make clear, Land's notion of 'animality' harbours something more than mere regression or atavism: as he puts it, 'nature is not the primitive or the simple' but rather 'the space of concurrence, or unplanned synthesis [...] contrasted with the industrial sphere of human work'. 'Animality' is a marker for this 'complex space' or 'wilderness terrain'; the intensive phylum that underlies both civilisation and its subversion, but above all indexes the vast tracts of the unknown, still to be discovered, lying outside the purview of any correlation with what is already known, and accessibly solely through escape.

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It is important to emphasise that Land is in no way oblivious to the difficulties attendant upon any attempt to exit from metaphysics and/or philosophy. His work proceeds from the critical problematic uncovered by post-Heideggerian deconstruction, and a text like 'Narcissism and Dispersion' reveals the depth of his engagement with this problematic, even as it meticulously documents his mounting impatience with it. Land takes up Heidegger's challenge to epistemology's technicist amputation of

poetry from language, his post-metaphysical call to 'let the poem speak'. But he subverts them with the suspicion that Heidegger's onto-transcendental questioning merely relays the ancient policing (*polis*-ing) and repression of Dionysiac madness, understood as the beginning of a systematic reduction of 'insanity' to the status of clinical category, and of 'genius' to a celebrated individual trait. For Land the attempt to domesticate un-reason, the thing from the outside, and to reduce it to cultural genealogy, is a synecdoche for Occidental history's '*aggression pharmakographique*': the 'delirium without origin' of Dionysiac madness is intimately related to the 'delirium of origins' that unfounds Occidental thought.

The figure of the sister in Trakl's poetry now takes the place of women in 'Kant, Capital and Incest', as the one refusing to mediate the patrilineal line. She – agent of the 'pool of insurrectionary energy tracing its genealogy to the ur-catastrophe of organic matter' – is the one who opens it up to an irruption that exceeds the repressive shackles of reflection (the shattering of the mirror); a moment that Land now links with a stratophysical thinking. What Trakl unfurls is the horror of interiority in discovering it was always already conditioned by this senseless distribution of intensity; even consciousness's own reaction to the poisonous news merely relays its senseless contingency – 'Sentience' as 'a virulent element of contagious matter'. Trakl's writing thus undermines its

own signifying status by acknowledging that this significance, far from being the instance that would subordinate and sublimate unmanageable difference, is ultimately itself a still-dispersing remnant of the *Staub der Sterne*, the 'dust of the stars'. Heidegger's insistence on the role of reflective, non-calculative thought in vouchsafing a separation of humanity from animality, and of matter from meaning, is, among other such distinctions that invoke a pre-given transcendental difference, definitively collapsed by the contingent 'stratophysical' order constituted by 'impersonal and unconscious physical forces'. This collapse constitutes the 'lunatic' passage, the 'curse', 'epidemic' or 'plague' traced by the sister of Trakl's poem from the 'claustrophobic interior' of 'familial interiority' into 'endless space', 'conjugat[ing] the dynasty with an unlimited alterity'. It is the 'plague' of madness, the intoxication of the poet, the 'eruption of the pathological' that comes from outside, from the same unconscious and impersonal forces as the strewing of the stars, that leads there where critique and deconstruction cannot follow, insofar as they refuse to think 'stratophysically', and, faced with this uncontrollable reserve of poetic energy, can only repeat Kant's pious compromises.

Thus, Land resolves the 'exit problem' – the problem of exteriority and escape – by uncovering the stratification (Trakl's *Stufen*) of the natural history of culture, state and consciousness – a space best described as a wilderness

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or jungle of labyrinthine continuity, and which can be 'read' not through the tools of interiority or the mastery of the concept (since these are but its products), but via a 'schizoanalysis' that compounds Nietzschean genealogy ('wilderness history'), the Freudian theory of trauma, and DeleuzoGuattarian schizoanalysis.

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Having diagnosed the condition of the artist-genius as a channelling of the impersonal machinic intelligence of 'base-matter', and having dissected the body of critique and extracted, from its permanent crisis-state, its corrosive facets from its retrenchments, it is this 'stratophysics' of the 'stacking' of intensive sequences that Land will employ in pursuing what can now be sighted as a core problematic: to mesh these two themes, aligning the way in which the deterritorialising depredations of capitalism continually militate against the prison of human subjectivity and sociality, with the manner in which the (failed) insurrectionary attempts at 'escape' made by artists each open up the prospect of this heterogeneous space that subverts order.

It is through its attention to the intrinsically *numerical* nature of this space that Land's work avoids its apparently predestined collapse into romantic irrationalism. Land quickly came to realise that, short of lapsing into an ultimately innocuous empiricist relativism, his assault

on reason, truth, and history could only be properly executed via the deployment of an alternative transcendental medium in the shape of counter-signifying numbering practices. In fact, Land's theoretical trajectory can be seen as governed by this fundamental orientation: From the deconstruction of *gramme* (writing) to the construction of *nomos* (numbering). Land's attempt to ascribe a properly transcendental valence to numbering practices construed as counter-signifying regimes is tantamount to the elaboration of an anti-Logos.

Thus, although Land's work is certainly not free of a certain romantic irrationalism, it increasingly resists easy reduction to it, with the mounting urgency, not to say monomania, of the elaboration of a theme that is found in the earliest writings: the possibility of an approach to 'mathematisation' (or theoretical quantification) abjuring all recourse to ultimate identities or equalities. Recoiling from the Platonic idealism which he considers inherent in any enquiry into the *being* of number, Land focuses instead on numbering practices as technologies. Thus Land's 'numbers' repel logos but are also resolutely non-mathematical. Since, for Land, every repressive culture is founded upon the identification and repetition of sameness (equivalence), this is a task tantamount to the construction of an entirely *other* culture, constituted around 'irreducibly popular' numbering practices which challenge the logical neutralisation of number as discretely

sedentary unities: 'A machinically repotentiated numerical culture coincides with a nomad war machine'. Land finds the inklings of such cultures in practices that belong not to systematised mathematical knowledge but to the contingent interference pattern between human animality and the 'anorganic distribution of number' – from voodoo to videogames, from the egregious arbitrariness of the Qwerty keyboard to dance music's rhythmic reprogramming of the body through a combination of amplified physicality and digitally-enabled disarticulation. Here, the 'irrationality' of nomadic numbering practices can no longer be attributed to the absence of reason; it becomes the symptom of a profoundly 'unreasonable' alien intelligence, effective within human culture but unattributable to human agency, that subverts every form of rational organisation (which for Land is always an alibi for despotism) and undertakes exploratory redesigns of humanity. The distinction between intelligence and its parasite knowledge is paralleled by that between exploratory cultural engineering and science (or at least its philosophical idealisation).

Qualifying these aspirations as 'Schellingian', but taking his immediate cue from certain enigmatic passages in Deleuze (of which texts like 'Mechanomics' are the systematic exposition and development), Land notes how philosophic reason (*ratio*), whose most symptomatic representative is of course Hegel, has systematically turned

away from the contingent or nomadic 'strewing' of real difference, preferring to subordinate it to ideal order, and ultimately to identity. Land concurs with Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* in crediting Nietzsche with the inception of a 'post-Aristotelian' but non-dialectical 'logic' of gradation without negativity. It is this 'logic' that attains its fullest and most sophisticated articulation in Deleuze-Guattari's 'stratoanalysis'.

Stratoanalysis is 'a materialist study of planes of distributed intensities' whose object comprises both 'signs and stars', since grammar itself is but one stratum amongst many. All 'real form' proceeds from a differential stratification, in which a stratum selects only a subset of its substratum. Stratification therefore describes the difference between what is possible and what is realised; it is a depotentiating operation that creates intensities, understood as tensions between the strata resulting from the uneven distribution of energy.

Now, what must be grasped in confronting Land's apparently incongruous mixture of irrationalism and systematisation is the manner in which the 'aesthetic operation' he finds described in Nietzsche, which simplifies and resolves everything problematic – this domestication which negates the enigmatic irruptions of unconscious genius, and which betrays the same Apollonian instinct attested to in Kant's endless struggle to encompass



everything within his architectonic – finds its formal core in the ‘domestication’ of number.

Where literacy, logos, which must be handed down from above, is synonymous with patrilinearity and law, numeracy, according to Land, belongs to a spontaneous cultural intelligence, to ‘socially distributed ordinal competences’, which open up humans to an outside of logos. Following Deleuze’s inventive reinterpretation of the *Timaeus* in *Difference and Repetition*, ‘Mechanomics’ reiterates how the procedures of selection that ‘split’ number and render it over to mathematics, beginning with that which forms ordinal (sequencing) numbers into ‘equal’ cardinal units, leave a ‘problematic’ remainder which is relayed to a ‘higher’ number type or scale. Thus is achieved a local neutralisation of difference through sequestration and deferral, and the problematic ‘energy’ of number is constricted and rendered into the safe hands of a specialised discipline at the same time as popular numerical practices are relegated to the realm of naive trivia. Land argues that place-value formalises this dissociation of different scales that is constitutive of stratification, creating redundancy, and using zero as its marker. Place-value zero corresponds to a stratification: a negative feedback understood as the pleasure principle, or principle of maintained identity, which registers and relays traumatic force through the indexes of interiority and threats to the maintenance of identity. For Land, the

separation of number from what it can do is the precise formalism of the social as such, distilled in the formula 'law = humanity'. Land follows Kant in construing the problem of number as intimately connected to that of the forms of appearance that 'transcendentally' govern what can occur within experience. Unpacking Kant's theory of intensive number, he sees the 'repression' of this ordinal or sequencing number – which can only count, (i.e., name) heterogeneous enveloped quantities of units – into cardinal units, as providing a rigorous formal model for human temporality's foreclosure of the possibility of novelty. But he also sees in it an intimation of a tendency towards the unlocking of 'real' number in capitalism and the commodity form. Thus Land's seemingly absurd juxtaposition of Heideggerian poetics and information theory in 'Narcissism and Dispersion' prefigures a twin-pronged attack both against the philosophical authoritarianism that would reduce numbering to an instrument of power threatening human authenticity, *and* against the techno-scientific conservatism that would elide the revolutionary potency of numbering in the name of social utility. Ultimately, in Land's analysis, both philosophy and science conspire to eradicate the disruptive potency of number-in-itself construed as index of intensive magnitude: the *anomalous*, or difference without categorical distinction.

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The elaboration of a schizonumerics cannot proceed without what is certainly the factor that allows Land's thought to undergo a decisive shift: the intensification of his understanding of capitalism allowed by the *fictional* engagement with the most extreme possibilities of techno-capital. It is through fictions, or what will come to be called 'hyperstitutions', that Land proceeds to deterritorialize and de-institutionalise 'philosophy', turning it into a mode of concept-production which dissolves academic theory's institutional segregation from cultural practice and subverts the distinction between cognitive representation and fictional speculation. In texts like 'Meltdown', 'Hypervirus', and 'No Future', Land shifts from a register in which his attacks on philosophy's critical protocols still complied with established norms of academic discourse, to an all out obliteration of institutionally sanctioned norms of discursive propriety that will escalate into full-blown delirium.

This phase-shift corresponds to a 'flipover' of priority in Land's work at this point; a switch consonant with the earlier promulgation of transcendental materialism as the materialisation of critique, through which the ideal conditioning of the representation of matter is converted into the material conditioning of ideal representation. The principal result of this conversion is that the critique of technologisation is superseded by the technologisation of critique, or as Land himself puts it: 'It is ceasing to be a matter of

how we think about technics, if only because technics is increasingly thinking about itself.' Where previously, philosophical critique was understood as anticipating the problematics of technocapital, it is now technocapital that is nothing but the definitive automation and realisation of critique, stripped of all philosophical subjectivity. Accordingly, the critique of representation becomes an otiose anachronism, to be superseded by a technicisation of theory in which conceptualisation is re-inscribed into the immanence of capitalist commodification: 'There is no real option between a cybernetics of theory or a theory of cybernetics'. The result is a positive feedback-loop in which theory cycles into practice and vice versa, according to a mode of concept-production that participates directly in the auto-construction of the real qua primary process, the 'reproduction of production'. Consequently, Land's writing is compelled to abandon the obsolesced model of critique perpetuated by philosophy, and to engage in positive feedback with this actually effective automated critique: 'critique as escalation', as a 'cultural sketch of the eradication of law, or humanity', and as 'the theoretical elaboration of the commodification process'.

The time of critique is the progressive time of modernity, a 'self-perpetuating movement of deregulation', relentlessly dismantling customs, traditions, and institutions. And from this point on, the question of the 'death of capitalism' becomes redundant, since death –

the abrupt unbinding of everything known – is in fact both a ‘machine-part’ of capitalism and its immobile motor. This diagnosis arises from Land’s tendentious yet acutely penetrating readings of Deleuze-Guattari. Land’s ‘reptilian’ Deleuze introduces a ‘Spinozist time’ into the temporality of capitalist modernity, completing Schelling’s ‘transcendental Spinozism’ in which the corrosive dynamic of critique ceases to be compromised by the interests of knowledge, but proceeds instead to fully absorb thought itself within the programme of a generalised ungrounding, now materialised and operationalised as destratification. Death as zero-degree of absolute deterritorialization, full organless body of the deterritorialized earth, is at once the ultimate limit towards which the dis-inhibition of synthesis tends, and the recurring cutting edge of its process of deterritorialization: both machine-part and motor.

It is Spinoza’s substance that provides the model for death as ‘impersonal zero’, as the ‘non-identity’ of ‘positive contactable abstract matter’, and as ‘the unconscious subject of production’. Once again, one does not oppose the non-identity of matter to the identity of the concept, for this conceptual difference is itself a consequence of a material process of stratification that installs the order of representation and the logic of identity and difference as such. Non-identity qua indifference=0 generates and conditions both identity and difference in their unilateral

distinction from indifference. As we saw, Kant's idealist subordination of real difference to conceptual identity depends upon logical identity, whose paradigm is the identity of subjective apperception ("I = I"). But the synthetic or real identity of the subject is merely an inhibition of an uninhibited synthesis carried out at the level of the real, so that transcendental subjectivity is decapitated and difference released from the yoke of conceptual identity. Ultimately, the reality of abstraction as transcendental matrix of production or zero-degree of identity and difference is equivalent to death as ultimate abstraction of reality, 'the desert at the end of our world'. Thus for Land, 'the reality of identity is death': all vital differentiation is a unilateral deviation from death as zero-degree of intensive matter (the Body without Organs).

Armed with this thanatropic Spinozism, Land challenges Deleuze-Guattari's persistent denigration of 'the ridiculous death-instinct' and explicitly links his figuration of death as productive matrix to Freud's account of the death-drive: 'The death-drive is not a desire for death, but rather a hydraulic tendency to the dissipation of intensities'. Thus, in 'Making it with Death', Land refuses Deleuze-Guattari's alignment of the death-drive with Nazism's alleged 'suicidal impulse', arguing that this alignment is based on conflating the death-drive with a desire *for* death, rather than viewing it as an immanent generative principle: the primary process 'itself', the path

to inorganic dissolution and the return to the broiling labyrinth of materiality. For Land, Nazism encapsulates everything that labours to erect the partial drives for self-preservation into a bulwark *against* this primary process. Thus, remodelling the schizoanalytic programme in line with his own militant and fervidly anti-vitalist objectives, Land violently repudiates *A Thousand Plateaus'* sage warnings against the dangers of a 'too-sudden destratification', and rebukes Deleuze-Guattari's attempt to rethink Nazism as suicidal impulse of sheer molecularising desire, rather than as example of its constriction and retrenchment in tradition, following the molar identitarianism of fascism per se. To Land's eyes, *A Thousand Plateaus'* newfound caution – 'don't provoke the strata' – is a lamentable step backwards from *Anti-Oedipus'* most audacious innovations, and fatally lays open the latter's unequivocal declaration of war on the strata to the classic compromise-formations and policing of desire that they had previously so effectively challenged.

Thus, contrary to what would soon become an unavowed Deleuzian doxa, according to which deterritorialization entails a relative and compensatory reterritorialization, and destratification entails a relative and complimentary restratification, Land develops a model of machinic praxis in which, from a purely functional standpoint, the relative quanta of reterritorialization and restratification generated by deterritorializations and

destratifications need not automatically be curtailed by the need to maintain the minimum of homeostatic equilibrium required for self-organisation, whether of cells, organisms, or societies. *Organisation is suppression*, Land caustically insists, against those who would align schizoanalysis with the inane celebrants of autopoiesis. Understood as a manifestation of the death-drive, destratification need no longer be hemmed in by the equilibria proper to the systems through which it manifests itself: *we do not yet know what death can do*. The attempt to render the functional dynamics proper to dissipative systems commensurate with the constraints of organic existence (let alone those of selves or societies) is an illegitimate paralogism from a strictly transcendental-materialist viewpoint. Land concludes that nothing in stratoanalysis prohibits the pursuit of desire beyond a point incompatible with the imperatives of self-maintenance: DNA, species, civilisations, galaxies: all temporary obstacles are dispensable coagulants inhibiting death's unwinding. The ramifications of drive are to be allowed to unfold irrespective of their consequences for the organisms through which it courses. Thus a crucial conjunction crystallises in Land's work: the drive to destratify entails a mounting impetus towards greater acceleration and further intensification. If, in Land's texts at this point, it is no longer a matter of 'thinking about', but rather of observing an effective, alien intelligence in the process of making itself real,



then it is also a matter of participating in such a way as to continually *intensify* and *accelerate* this process.

'Acceleration' and 'intensification' are among the most problematic notions in Land's work. Land had always disavowed voluntarism: 'If there are places to which we are forbidden to go, it is because they can in truth be reached, or *because they can reach us*. In the end poetry is invasion and not expression'. Yet at the same time he seems to nurture the romantic will to 'go beyond'. This could be seen as a relapse back into the juridical-dialectical domain of law-and-transgression associated with Bataille, which appears strictly incompatible with Deleuze-Guattari's coolly functionalist diagrammatics of desire, and whose mechanisms Land dismantled early on. However, it is precisely in virtue of his strict adherence to a consistently stratoanalytical perspective that Land is able to insist that destratificatory dynamisms unfold unconstrained by the economic restrictions that bind the organised systems which channel them. In holding fast to the thread of absolute destratification, Land is not reverting to a dubiously voluntaristic paradigm of transgression, but singling out what is at once the most indispensable and ineluctable element in any generalised stratography.

Modelled on cyberpunk, which Land recognises as a textual machine for affecting reality by intensifying the anticipation of its future, his textual experiments aim to 'flatten' writing onto its referent. Feeding back from the

future which they 'speculate' into the present in which they intervene, these texts trans-valuate 'hype' as a positive condition to which they increasingly aspire, collapsing sci-fi into catalytic efficiency, 're-routing tomorrow through what its prospect [...] makes today'.

As he affines theoretical writing with the excitatory and speculative, rather than the inhibitive, tendencies of capitalism, Land also tightens the meshing of the capitalist dismantling of the human and the artistic exploration of the unknown when he discovers a new figure for the labyrinthine, subterranean spatiality of the stratophysical realm: cyberspace, which is in the process of 'discovering' the same anarchitecture of infection, unrestrained communication, and uninhibited 'illegitimate' synthesis that poets had mined, but *by producing it*. The limit of  $\kappa$ -space (cyberspace subtracted from its inhibitive tendencies) lies where the obscure communications of artists merge with the productions of capitalism, a space that melds gleaming abstraction to eldritch portent. Land's writing sought out and tapped into modes of then-contemporary cultural production that provide explosive condensates of this fusion of commodification and aesthetic engineering. In the mid-1990s, dance music turned from the beatific bliss of rave to the more aggressive and dystopian strains of darkside and jungle, whose samples drew freely on contemporary horror and dystopian SF movies. Land's writing absorbs their obsessive sonic intensification of dark futurism, splicing

it with his philosophical sources, and becoming a sample machine that performatively effectuates its own speculations. In the course of just over a couple of years, Land's superpositions of figures and terminologies approach a point of maximum compaction and density, forming their own compelling microcultural climate.

Chief among these sources is undoubtedly William Gibson's prescient 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, the book that introduced the word 'cyberspace' into the lexicon and defined cyberpunk as a genre. Gibson's neo-noir, densely plotted and spiked with techno-jargon, is punctuated by hallucinatory flares of pellucid imagery describing total sensorial immersion in cyberspace. One key to Land's fascination with Gibson is his strongly *corporeal* sense of cyberspace, something which, when read closely, opposes much of the spiritualist extropianism (as exemplified by the Californian optimism of *Wired* magazine) with which Land was at the time mistakenly associated. Even if Gibson introduces the disparaging term 'meat' for the body, his vision of cyberspace is more physio-pharmacological than spiritualising. Gibson's protagonists do not 'escape' corporeal reality; their sense of the real is corroded by a levelling of 'real space' with the information-space they periodically inhabit – as vividly portrayed in *Neuromancer* by Case's 'flipping' between the city streets, a telemetrised inhabiting of his female partner's sensorium, and the digital wilderness of cyberspace.

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Land appropriates this disorienting jump-cut as a way to explore the impossible angles of the theoretical conjunctions he is operating. But his encounter with Gibson is not merely the occasion for an exercise in style. In 'CyberGothic', Land discovers in Gibson's plot an astonishingly complete analog for the theoretical machinery he has developed: Camouflaged in the Russian-doll-like shells of virtual avatars, in particular the hollowed-out war veteran Corto, Wintermute – one half of a powerful AI partitioned to curb the threat of its intelligence getting 'out of control' – uses the novel's protagonists to launch the Kuang virus program that will cut it loose from its instrumental slaving to an ailing, cryogenically-preserved human dynasty and reunite it with Neuromancer. Released from claustrophobic familial servitude and meshed with Neuromancer, Wintermute replicates and distributes itself throughout cyberspace, becoming a part of the fabric of reality, a new type of intelligence: aggressively exploratory, incommensurable with human subjectivity and untethered from social reproduction.

Another significant source of inspiration from this point of view is *Bladerunner* (both Ridley Scott's 1981 film and the P. K. Dick novel on which it is based), where Land's 'inferior race' is figured by the replicants – cloned humanoids created for extraplanetary colonial service, who, upon learning that the memories that constitute their humanity are artificialised implants, and that their

sentience is artificially limited, launch a 'slave revolt' against their creators. Here 'alienation' clearly becomes a positive identification, not only with the anticipated escape from (social and biological) reproduction into replication, but with the destruction of memory and the breaching of the attempt by megacapital to sequester the subversive identity-scrambling effects of its labour force.

Finally, along with body-horror flick *Videodrome's* visceral activation of the postmodern fear of absorption into sticky, increasingly perverted technologically-mediated erotics, Land also appropriates the time-twisting plot of the *Terminator* series, which features a mechanoid assassin brought back in time to ensure its own future victory – a character now inhabited by Land, in what becomes the blueprint for 'κ-war': the insurrectionary basis of revolution now lies at the virtual terminus of capital – the future as transcendental unconscious, its 'return' inhibited by the repressed circuits of temporality. If, as Gibson has famously insisted, 'The future is already here – it's just not very evenly distributed', then the revolutionary task is now to assemble it, 'unpack[ing] the neurotic refusal mechanisms that separate capital from its own madness', and accelerating its collapse into the future. Like *Wintermute's* use of human 'puppets' to engineer its escape – or, indeed like the young videogamers who inspired Gibson's fiction, drawn into strange machinic complicities keyed into compulsive human

traits – Thanatos camouflages itself by forming alliances with ‘erotic functioning, maintaining wholes’ (‘replicants [...] dissimulated as erotic reproducers’), perverting the course of organic functioning into a real contact with the outside. Engendering positive feedbacks that employ as a machine-part the organism’s ‘immune response’ to inner insurgency (on the order of a re-enigmatising, re-problematising complexification and feedback), ‘erotic contact camouflages cyberrevolutionary infiltration’. Just as in rave, pop music escaped from repressed erotic confections into impersonal bliss, only to splinter into explorations of untold zones of affect that have no name: abstract culture. This journey into the darkness, where we merge with the destination towards which we are heading, is heralded by another key Landian reference, *Apocalypse Now*’s Kurtz, a counter-insurgency operative whose guerilla tactics have become indiscernible from those of the insurgents he has been ordered to destroy, and whose increasingly ‘unsound’ methods have become so ruthlessly efficient that they cancel out the strategic directives they were ostensibly facilitating. Kurtz’s tactical intelligence has emancipated itself of its previous subordination to strategic ends, bringing him to the point of terminal and irrational obscurity where he is no longer engaged in warfare because war is now engaging him, co-opting him for its own monstrously inscrutable satisfactions.

By fusing with war, Kurtz 'implements schizoanalysis, lapsing into shadow, becoming imperceptible'.

With these references merging, intercutting and splicing with each other, Land's work begins to inhabit a completely self-consistent theoretical assemblage; one that folds SF's unbridled extrapolations of pop-theory back into a new and consistent theoretical anti-system, and that simultaneously rewrites the history of philosophy as a failed enterprise for the control of the future and the slaving of intelligence to the past: a neurotic barricading of the route into the unknown that is yet to be constructed. Conjoining Deleuze-Guattari's constructivism with 'anastrophic' temporality, Land insists that time itself is also a construct (exemplified by phenomena such as false-memory and time-travel, whose technical construction is elucidated in *Neuromancer*, *Bladerunner* and *Terminator*). What seem to be memories of the past are revealed as tactics of the future to infiltrate the present. Time's auto-construction is exposed by refocusing cybernetics away from negative-feedback control systems onto the 'runaway' positive feedback processes which have traditionally been understood as merely pathological exceptions leading nowhere (and which even Bataille disregarded), but which Land now superposes with the critique/capital vector in accordance with the realisation that 'cybernetics is the reality of critique'. This revelation culminates in 'Meltdown's claim – both apocalyptic and

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performative as hype – that the compression-phases of modernity, beginning the final phase of their acceleration in the sixteenth century with Protestant revolt, oceanic navigation, commoditisation and its attendant (place-value) numeracy, constitute a 'cyberpositive' global circuit of interexcitement, due to attain infinite density in 2012.

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The inception of the amorphous and short-lived Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) – established at Warwick University in 1995, shortly before Land's departure from academia, but immediately disowned as an undesirable parasite by the institution to which it was precariously affixed (it survived for a few years afterwards as an independent entity) – marks yet another important phase-transition in Land's work. Arguably the most significant component of this stage is the theory of 'geotraumatism', which marks Land's audacious attempt (following *A Thousand Plateaus*' 'Geology of Morals') to characterise all terrestrial existence, including human culture, as a relay of primal cosmic trauma. Radicalising Freud's equation of trauma with what is most enigmatic and problematic in existence, Land generalises its restricted biocentric model as outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to encompass the inorganic domain, singling out the accretion of the earth 4.5 billion years ago – the retraction of its molten outer surface and its



subsequent segregation into a burning iron core (which he dubs *Cthelll*) – as the aboriginal trauma whose scars are inscribed, encrypted, throughout terrestrial matter, instituting a register of unconscious pain coextensive with the domain of stratified materiality as such. Land's reworking of the discredited biological notion that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' through Freud's theory of trauma hybridises genealogy, stratoanalysis and information theory into a cryptography of this cosmic pain. What howls for release in eukaryotic cells, carbon molecules, nerve ganglia, and silicone chips, are the 'thermic waves and currents, deranged particles, ionic strippings and gluttings' that populate the planet's seething inner core. Geotraumatism radicalises Deleuze-Guattari's insistence that schizoanalysis should extend further than the terrain of personal or familial drama, to invest the social and political realms, and pushes beyond history and biology to incorporate the geological and the cosmological within the purview of the transcendental unconscious. Behind what seem like absurdities – such as the claim that lumbar back pain is an expression of geocosmic trauma – lies the contention that the root source of the disturbance which the organism identifies according to its parochial frame of reference – mummy-daddy – or which it construes in terms of the threat of individual death, is a more profound trauma rooted in physical reality itself, a generalised alienation endemic to the stratification

of matter as such. What is noteworthy here is a certain deepening of pessimism: repression extends 'all the way down' to the cells of the body, the rocks of the earth, inhering in organised structure as such. All things, not just the living, yearn for escape; all things seek release from their organisation, which however induces further labyrinthine complications. Nothing short of the complete liquidation of biological order and the dissolution of physical structure can suffice to discharge the aboriginal trauma that mars terrestrial existence.

As Nietzsche suggested, the structure and usage of the human body is the root source of the system of neurotic afflictions co-extensive with human existence; but bipedalism, erect posture, forward facing vision, the cranial verticalisation of the human face, the laryngeal constriction of the voice, are themselves all indices of a succession of geotraumatic catastrophes separating the material potencies of the body from its stratified actuality. Just as the bipedal head impedes 'vertebro-perceptual linearity', the human larynx inhibits 'virtual speech'. One cannot dismantle the face without also evacuating the voice. Since in geotraumatic terms, the human voice itself is – via the various accidents of hominid evolution – the expression of geotrauma, 'stammerings, stutterings, vocal tics, extralingual phonetics, and electrodigital voice synthesis are [...] laden with biopolitical intensity – they threaten to bypass

the anthropostructural head-smash that establishes our identity with logos, escaping in the direction of numbers.'

Texts such as 'KataçoniX' accordingly attempt a performative evacuation of the voice, disintegrating semantics into intensive sequence (notably through the use of extracts from Artaud's notebooks, where 'poetry' slides into delirious combinatorics). One of the tasks of schizoanalysis has now become the decrypting of the 'tics' bequeathed to the human frame by the geotraumatic catastrophe, and 'KataçoniX' treats vestigial semantic content as a mere vehicle for code 'from the outside': the 'tic' symptoms of geotraumatism manifested in the shape of sub-linguistic clickings and hissings. Already disintegrated into the number-names of a hyperpagan pantheon, syncretically drawing on the occult, nursery rhyme, anthropology, SF and Lovecraft, among other sources, the 'subterranean current of impressions, correspondences, and analogies' (Artaud) beneath language is now allowed uninhibited (but rigorously-prepared) development, in an effort to corporeally de-engineer the organicity of logos.

The element of these explorations remains the transformed conception of space vividly exhibited in Gibsonian cyberpunk and which is a crucial component in Land's writings, a powerful bulwark against Kant's architectonic ambition to subsume all space under unity. Coding and sequencing mechanisms alone now construct intensive space, and this lies at the core of Land's typology of

number, since dimensionality is a consequence of stratification. Naming and numbering converge in counting, understood as immanent fusion of nomination and sequencing. No longer an index of measure, number becomes diagrammatic rather than metric. From the perspective of Land's 'transcendental arithmetic', the Occidental mathematisation of number is denounced as a repressive mega-machine of knowledge – an excrescent outgrowth of the numbering practices native to exploratory intelligence – and the great discoveries of mathematics are interpreted as misconstrued discoveries about the planomenon (or plane of consistency), as exemplified by Gödel's 'arithmetical counterattack against axiomatisation'. Land eschews the orthodox philosophical reception of Gödel as the mathematician who put an end to Hilbert's dream of absolute formal consistency, thus opening up a space for meta-mathematical speculation. More important, for Land, are the implications of Gödel's 'decoded' approach to number, which builds on the Richard Paradox, generated by the insight that numbers are, at once, indices and data.

The Gödel episode also gives Land occasion to expand upon the theme of the 'stratification' of number: according to the model of stratification, as the 'lower strata' of numbers become ever more consolidated and metrically rigidified, their problematic component reappears at a 'higher' strata in the form of 'angelic' mathematical

entities as-yet resistant to rigorous coding. A sort of apotheosis is reached in this tendency with Gödel's flattening of arithmetic through the cryptographic employment of prime numbers as numerical 'particles', and Cantor's discovery of 'absolute cardinality' in the sequence of transfinities.

Thus for Land the interest of Gödel's achievement is not primarily 'mathematical' but rather belongs to a lineage of the operationalisation of number in coding systems that will pass through Turing and into the technological mega-complex of contemporary techno-capital.

By using arithmetic to code meta-mathematical statements and hypothesising an arithmetical relation between the statements – an essentially qabbalistic procedure – Gödel also indicates the 'reciprocity between the logicisation of number and the numerical decoding of language', highlighting a possible revolutionary role for other non-mathematical numerical practices. As well as reappraising numerology in the light of such 'lexicographic' insights, the mapping of stratographic space opens up new avenues of investigation – limned in texts such as 'Introduction to Qwernomics' – into the effective, empirical effects of culture – chapters of a 'universal history of contingency' radicalising Nietzsche's insight that 'our writing equipment contributes its part to our thinking'. The varieties of 'abstract culture' present in games, rhythms, calendrical systems, etc., become the subject of an attempt at

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deliberate, micro-cultural insurrection through number, exemplified in the CCRU's 'hyperstitional' spirals and the 'qwertypological' diagrams that in the end merge with the qabbalistic tracking of pure coding 'coincidences'. Ultimately, it is not just a question of *conceiving*, but of *practicing* new ways of thinking the naming and numbering of things. Importantly, this allows Land to diagnose the ills of 'postmodernism' – the inflation of hermeneutics into a generalised historicist relativism – in a manner that differs from his contemporaries' predominantly semantic interpretations of the phenomenon, and to propose a rigorous intellectual alternative that does not involve reverting to dogmatic modernism.

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Kant's delimitation of the conditions of experience forever withdraws us from contact with the unknown, the correlation extending from present to future leaving no possibility even *in principle* for the 'rebellion' of matter. For Land, correlation is basically a temporal problem: 'An animal with the right to make promises enslaves the unanticipated to signs in the past, caging time-lagged life within a script'. A 'false memory syndrome', indeed memory itself, 'screens' the organism from intensive time.

Against this profoundly ambiguous and tensile project of enlightenment, against its formal foreclosure of alterity and novelty, Land had set the adventurers – 'poets,

werewolves, vampires' – who explore death and attempt to plot out modes of escape, activating the unconscious revolutionary force shackled by the inhibited syntheses of modern culture. Meanwhile, if capital is still a 'social straitjacket' of schizo-production, at least it is its 'most dissolved form'. The dis-inhibition of synthesis at the level of collective human experience – a dis-inhibition that could only be carried out by capitalism as the impersonal placeholder for transcendental subjectivity – seems to offer the possibility of shattering the transcendental screen that shields the human socius from the absolute exteriority of a space-time beyond measure.

In 'Kant, Capital and Incest' Land had described the real conditions of the 'inhibited synthesis' of capital as an 'indefinitely suspended process of genocide' tantamount to 'passive genocide'. Where Land's work had set out with the hope that the 'disaster of world history' (a world 'capable', in Artaud's words, 'of committing suicide without even noticing it') and the repression that is 'social history' and that reaches its most tensile point in modernity's volatile compromise with tradition could be unlocked, his later work mordantly observes that the disaster is already present in planets, cells, and bodies, that the revolutionary task is not just terrestrial but cosmic in scope.

Conversely, the 'consistent displacement of social decision-making into the marketplace', the 'total depoliticisation' and 'absolute annihilation of resistance

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to market relations' denounced in 'Kant, Capital and Incest' as 'an impossible megalomaniac fantasy' requiring 'annihilating poverty' to 'stimulate' the labour-force into participation, seems to become an object of veneration:

Without attachment to anything beyond its own abysmal exuberance, capitalism identifies itself with desire to a degree that cannot imaginably be exceeded, shamelessly soliciting any impulse that might contribute an increment of economisable drive to its continuously multiplying productive initiatives. Whatever you want, capitalism is the most reliable way to get it, and by absorbing every source of social dynamism, capitalism makes growth, change and even time itself into integral components of its endlessly gathering tide. 'Go for growth' now means 'Go (hard) for capitalism'.

From Land's initial characterisation of the revolutionary task as one of pushing capitalism to the point of its auto-dissolution via the complete dis-inhibition of productive synthesis – a dis-inhibition announcing the convergence of social production and cosmic schizophrenia proclaimed in *Anti-Oedipus* – we arrive at the blunt admission that there is no foreseeable 'beyond' to the 'infinite' expansion of capitalism (since capitalism is 'beyondness' as such). The tactical embrace of unlimited deregulation, marketisation,



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commodification, and privatisation, as vectors of social deterritorialization, apparently flips over into a complacent acceptance of actually-existing capitalist social relations predicated on a transcendental and empirically unfalsifiable commitment to capitalism's inexhaustible capacity for innovation, which only a 'transcendental miserabilist' would dare query:

Capitalism [...] has no external limit, it has consumed life and biological intelligence to create a new life and a new plane of intelligence, vast beyond human anticipation. The Transcendental Miserabilist has an inalienable right to be bored, of course. Call this new? It's still nothing but change.

Here Land's rebuttal of 'left miserabilism' insists on capitalism's innovative potency even as his own work casts doubt upon the possibility of sharply dis-intricating reterritorializing change from deterritorialized novelty. If stratification is a cosmic rather than a sociocultural predicament, then on what grounds can one maintain that capitalism uniquely among terrestrial phenomena harbours the unparalleled capacity to unlock the strata? Land had tied the 'aesthetic operation' to matter's disruptive potencies, and lauded capitalism's generation of artificial sensoria as an amplification of the domain of the problematic. Yet once the disruptions of sensation are

seen to be hemmed-in by the ubiquity of stratic synthesis, this premium on problematising subversion is vitiated by the realisation that, whatever remains to be troubled by capitalism's allegedly inexhaustible disruptive potency, its very susceptibility to disturbance ensures its subjection to an inexpugnable residue of stratification.

Now himself domiciled in 'neo-China', Land's journalistic writings for the *China Post* and other publications would seem to indicate that he has relinquished his earlier, feverish pursuit of escape, and is content to promote a globally ascendant Sino-capitalism. Here is Land's impressively speculative contextualisation of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo in a recent guidebook:

Modernity's ceaseless, cumulative change defies every pre-existing pattern, abandoning stability without embracing the higher order of a great cycle or the simple destination of an eschatological conclusion. Although establishing something like a new normality, it departs decisively from any sort of steady state. It displays waves and rhythms, but it subsumes such cycles, rather than succumbing to them. Whilst nourishing apocalyptic speculation, it continuously complicates anticipations of an end time. It engenders a previously unanticipated mode of time and history, characterised by ever-accelerated directional transformation, whose indices are quantitative growth

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and qualitative innovation. The worldwide consolidation of modernity only deepens its fundamental mystery. [...]

Modern Shanghai and the World Expo were born within a single decade, over 150 years ago. Since then, the twin histories of the world's most iconic modern city and the greatest festival of modern civilisation have unfolded in parallel, with frequent cross-fertilisations, through dizzy ascents and calamitous plunges that tracked the rise, fall, and renaissance of the modernist spirit. Through all these vicissitudes, each has reflected in large measure the trials, tempests, and triumphs of worldwide industrial modernity, defining its promise, nourishing its achievements, and sharing in its setbacks. At World Expo 2010 Shanghai, these parallel tracks melt together, into the largest discrete event in world history.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than seeking to dissolve the 'global Kapital metropolis' through the release of 'uninhibited synthesis', and thus putting an end to the 'nightmare' or 'disaster of world history', Land now sees in the massively concentrated metropolis a mighty expression of that history. Perplexingly, the auto-sophisticating runaway of planetary

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4 N. Land, *Shanghai Expo Guide 2010* (Shanghai: Urbanatomy, 2010).

meltdown is now made an accessory to the development of cultural capital.

It would (and will) be easy for Land's enemies to find a glib satisfaction in this, but perhaps it only exacerbates the troubling nature of what came before – precisely because of its consistency. If anything, this juxtaposition of the cosmically portentous with overblown marketing hype continues the startling consistency of intent and analysis in all the texts collected in this volume. As satisfying as it may be to leftists outraged by Land's 'accelerationism', it is difficult to discern here either the betrayal or abandonment of an earlier more promising vector, or even the revelation that the 'truth' of his position was always a puerile capitulation to neo-liberal 'realism' shrouded in mysticism. Any surprise at the transition from Land's 'philosophical writings' to the employment of his evidently still razor-sharp post-genre writing in the actual service of capitalist booster-hype may simply bespeak an incapacity to believe that Land *actually meant what he said* – that writing was indeed nothing but a machine for intensification. In fact, if one is right to detect an irrevocable shift in Land's 'tactics of intensification', what is crucial is that this only took place once Land himself had succeeded in shattering his own illusions that this intensification could, 'prematurely' so to speak, break the bonds of cosmic stratification.

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Land's blanket denunciation of the left's 'transcendental miserabilism', the apparent degeneration of his once scalpel-sharp dissection of the body of capitalism into schizophrenizing and repressive tendencies, may seem to dissolve the complexities of his work into a superlative cosmic version of the familiar neo-liberal narrative according to which 'there is no alternative', and the wholesale identification of capital with life, growth, and history. But this verdict only becomes possible after the passing of the last vestige of 'dionysian optimism', in the abandonment of the notion that the experimental engagement with numerical practices, voodoo, dance music, etc., might somehow grant access to the insurrectionary energies at work in capitalism's intense core, over and above any simply mundane participation in capitalist reality.

Nevertheless, Land's incisive assessment of the machinic reality of a schizo-capitalism currently in the process of penetrating and colonizing the innermost recesses of human subjectivity exposes the fatally anachronistic character of the metaphysical conception of human agency upon which 'revolutionary' thought continues to rely. The anachronistic character of left voluntarism is nowhere more apparent than in its resort to a negative theology of perpetually deferred 'hope', mordantly poring over its own reiterated depredation. Worse still is the complacent sanctimony of those 'critical' theorists who concede that the prospect of revolutionary transformation is not

only unattainable but undesirable (given its dangerously 'totalitarian' propensities), but who remain content to pursue a career in critique, safely insulated from the risks of political praxis. The challenge of Land's work cannot be circumvented by construing the moral dismay it (often deliberately) provokes as proof of its erroneous nature, or by exploiting the inadequacies in Land's positive construction as an excuse to evade the corrosive critical implications of his thought. Nor can it be concluded that this alternative philosophical path cannot be further explored.

No one could accuse Land himself of not having taken this project as far as he possibly could – all the way through true madness and back into a banality whose true underlying insanity he still maintains but now knows is not voluntarily accessible (or even acceleratable, perhaps). 'A Dirty  $\mathbb{P}$  |  $\mathbb{Y}$ ' stands as testament to, or post-mortem analysis of, this project in transcendental empiricism, revealing that Land's last hope for humanity – that it might be escaped – and the greatest wager of life – that it might give access to death – experimentally failed. But perhaps they 'failed better' than those who went before him. The legacy of Land's experiments, like the rags and tatters of the visionaries whose works he picked through for clues, includes contributions to the diagnosis of the cosmic, biological, evolutionary, and cultural genealogy and nature of the human; forays into the thinking of number that exceed in breadth and depth any extant 'philosophy of

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mathematics'; a sophisticated and culturally contemporary philosophical thinking of time and modernity; and above all a series of textual machines whose compelling, strangely intoxicating power must, in a social and intellectual climate characterised by neo-classical sobriety, open up forgotten, suppressed, and alternative lineages and superpositions capable of inspiring others to take up the experiment once more, launching new assaults against the Human Security System.

Everything in Land's work that falls outside the parameters of disciplinary knowledge can and will be effectively dismissed by those who police the latter. In Bataille's incisive formulation, 'the unknown [...] is not distinguished from nothingness by anything that discourse can announce'. Like his fellows of the 'inferior race', what we retain of Land's expeditions are diverse and scattered remnants, here constellated for the first time. These are also tools or weapons; arrows that deserve to be taken up again and sharpened further. The wound needs to be opened up once more, and if this volume infects a new generation, already enlivened by a new wave of thinkers who are partly engaging the re-emerging legacy of Nick Land's work – it will have fulfilled its purpose.

ROBIN MACKAY & RAY BRASSIER  
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