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The Ambivalence of Imagining the “OUTSIDE”: On Nick Land’s Libidinal Materialism

Abstract: This paper seeks to offer a critical assessment of Nick Land’s early writings in light of his views on “libidinal materialism”. Being a relatively niche figure in the 1990s and 2000s, Nick Land rose to prominence in the 2010s due to the publication of his collected writings as *Fanged Noumena*, in 2011, which revealed him as one of the forerunners of accelerationism, an ambivalent political theory which promoted the need to accelerate “through” (rather than “against”) the elements of capitalism in order to reach a “post-capitalist” future. The aim of this paper is to shed light on an earlier concept developed by Land in his first book, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, that of “libidinal materialism”. Although Land’s popularity, both in popular culture and in academic discussions, has slowly grown in the last decade, most of the analyses concerning his philosophy revolve around his specific form of Deleuzo-Guattarian-infused “accelerationism”, marginalizing his initial interest in Georges Bataille, the central figure of *Thirst for Annihilation*. Thus, the present paper attempts to analyze, through a close reading of Land’s first book, some of the author’s first philosophical explorations, such as his discontents with the style of academic philosophical writing, his rejection of Kantian transcendentalism in favor of Bataillean “expenditure” and his first original concept, “libidinal materialism”. Throughout this exploration, what stands out the most is Land’s relentless criticism of Kantian philosophy and his efforts to construct an alternative to the post-Kantian tradition in continental philosophy.

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In the last decade, Nick Land’s name has become synonymous with one of the vilest strands of right-wing politics, its “neo-reactionary” side (also known as “NRx”) (Sandifer 5). Ever since the publication of his essays now collected in *The*

Dark Enlightenment, Land has not refrained from discussing such problematic topics as the inefficiency of democracy, “human biodiversity”, “hyper-racism”, appreciation of the Austrian school of economics (precursors to the neoliberal tradition of economics) etc. Land has not always been such an outspoken supporter of the (far-)right, however, and his earlier texts portray him as an aspiring philosopher who had much to offer in terms of original insights, both from a conceptual, as well as from a formal standpoint. Many recent analyses of his texts favor discussions around the “experiments in inhumanism” (Mackay) conducted by Land in the writings collected in *Fanged Noumena*, yet very few discuss his earliest, 1992 book, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, and its forays into the philosophy of Georges Bataille. By tackling precisely this very early period of Land’s writings, the aim of this article is to lay the foundation for a better understanding of the British author’s philosophy, underlining and discussing those concepts which could be later linked to other directions in Land’s thought.

The Thirst for Annihilation (henceforth abbreviated *TfA*) is no ordinary book of secondary literature on the French philosopher Georges Bataille. Neither does Land attempt to trace Bataille’s intellectual biography, nor to present more or less clearly, as in an introduction, the French thinker’s main concepts, nor does it propose any hypothesis linking his concepts to others in the theoretical realm. Instead, *TfA* begins with a quasi-manifesto on Land’s part for a philosophy that must “avoid [...] vulgarity and anthropomorphism” (xx), continues with a brief heterodox history of Western post-Kantian philosophy, enters a fictional parenthesis at one point in which Land-turned-narrator recounts how he kills God on Easter Day, and ends with a poem by Land on night and incommunicability. Although *TfA* seems a strange and gnomic book from the exaggerated summary I have just sketched, it is possible to extract from it some insights that will prove crucial for an incipient understanding of Land’s theoretical project. In what follows, I will discuss five central aspects of *TfA* that sketch a rough portrait of early Landian philosophy: the resistance to an academic model of doing philosophy, the opposition to Western post-Kantian philosophy, the proposal of Bataille’s ideas as an alternative to the (post-)Kantian tradition, the tracing of the most important coordinates of “libidinal materialism”, the critique of certain aspects of this kind of materialism, the introduction of certain recurrent Landian terms appropriated from Bataille (zero, contagion/virulence, collapse, etc.).

Anti-academicism

Certain elements of Land’s opposition to mainstream academic writing, especially of a formal nature, are also evident from the above paragraph, such as the introduction of a fictional interlude on the killing of God (*TfA* 75-80) or some of his own poems (*TfA* 210). There are, however, also theoretical reasons for Land’s opposition to the

'academization' of philosophy. Although at times Land seems to reject what we might call the "neoliberalization of the university" or the subsuming of the interests of the university to socio-economic reasons (*TfA* 11), he takes Schopenhauer as his model in this struggle against the university. What Schopenhauer imputes to the university, and Land does, too, following in his footsteps, is the adherence to the interests of the state, which goes hand in hand with servitude to "monotheistic dogma", which, in a secularized form, we may suspect refers to popular opinion. In this situation, philosophy decays, "degrading it to a grotesquely hypocritical sophistry, fueled by a petty careerism spiced by an envious hatred of intellectual independence, and articulated in a wretchedly obscure and distorted jargon that allows its proponents both to squirm away from the surveillance of the priests, and to hypnotize a gullibly adoring public" (*TfA* 10). Given his adherence to Schopenhauer's ideas, it is not surprising that the negative examples Land offers on the question of the academization of philosophy are Hegel and, in contemporary times, Derrida, both of whom write "in a ghoulish technical jargon squirming within a tortured syntax" (*TfA* 20).

Although it is a marginal issue in the larger theoretical structure of *TfA*, I have chosen to begin this section with Land's perspective on the 'enclosure' of philosophy within the university because it influences both his philosophical style and some of the ideas I will mention later. Instead of the inert philosophy that Land finds in some of the philosophers already mentioned, such as Hegel or Derrida, he adheres to a philosophy capable of following the thread of theoretical arguments even beyond their logical limit: "[s]trong thought is always experimentation in the severe style; 'cut, then watch'" (*TfA* 153). For Land, a genuine philosopher must be impersonal not in his style, which must, following Bataille's model I will discuss below, be the excessive tool of a contagion with the source matter, but in his willingness to transcend all the humanistic prejudices that constitute the core of Western philosophy. Given Land's contempt towards any form of humanism, it is inevitable that most of the problems he raises for Western philosophy can be traced back to Immanuel Kant, the thinker who is said to have inaugurated a "Copernican revolution" in Western philosophy.

Anti-Kantianism

Given that *TfA* is primarily a book about Georges Bataille, it is possible that treating the latter from a Kantian rather than a Hegelian perspective may seem suspect, especially if we accept that Alexandre Kojève, perhaps the greatest popularizer of Hegel in the French-speaking world in the early 20th century, played a decisive influence on Bataille's thinking (Stanciu & State 5). Land, however, argues for the Kantian grid he applies to Bataille by (rather crudely) reducing the Hegelian project to a mere continuation and attempted "rescue" of Kantian philosophy: "Hegel's philosophy is the life-support machine of Kantianism, the

medical apparatus responding to a crisis” (*TfA* 3). Moreover, Land argues that Bataille’s entire vocabulary would be designed to discuss primarily a Kantian problem, whether the French philosopher recognized it or not (*TfA* 3). In terms of the present thesis, the lack of further discussion of the Hegelian influence on Bataille is motivated by the heightened importance that Kant plays in *TfA* and Landian philosophy as a whole. I consider it more urgent, then, to elucidate the importance of Kant in Land’s thought.

Kant transforms Western philosophy completely when he proposes his own system, transcendental idealism, in response to the various branches of dogmatic metaphysics that had gone before. In the words of the German philosopher,

I understand by the *transcendental idealism* of all appearances the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves, and accordingly that space and time are only sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given for themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves. (*Critique of Pure Reason* 426)

The key terms in the above quotation are ‘phenomena’ and ‘things-in-themselves’ (also known in Kantian philosophy as *noumena*), but more important than just mentioning and postulating them is the relation Kant proposes between these two terms, to which Land will react the most throughout *TfA*. Transcendental idealism is placed in opposition both to dogmatic forms of idealism, which would characterize surrounding phenomena as products arising solely from the consciousness of the subject, thus relativizing the existence of ‘things-in-themselves’, and to dogmatic forms of realism, which would postulate the existence of objects-in-themselves independently of any relation to human consciousness, thus relativizing the possibility of human understanding of any kind of human understanding of objects-in-themselves. Rather than a simplistic opposition to these two branches of dogmatic metaphysics, transcendental idealism synthesizes them, uniting specific features of each of the two positions. Kant accepts the possibility of the existence of “things-in-themselves”, but limits and conditions the knowledge of these things, affirming that human reason could only have access to the representations that these “things-in-themselves” would produce on the senses, and not to the “things-in-themselves” as they actually are: “we cannot possibly know it [the object] by the senses as it is in itself” (*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* 30).

Before discussing the specific criticism Land develops against Kantian transcendentalism, it is important to briefly introduce a terminological particularity Land employs to distinguish between *phenomena* and *noumena*. In a seemingly gnomic formulation, which in fact anticipates Quentin Meillassoux’s definition of Kantian “correlationism”, Land says that “the outside must pass by way of the inside” (*Fanged Noumena* 320). The locus circumscribed by ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ is the Kantian subject, which (self-)constitutes itself by filtering the information received from the ‘outside’ (the experiences that the *noumenal*

realm arouse in human sensibility) through various means that are found in its 'inside' (the categories of understanding that systematize and classify phenomenal experiences). The problem that Land raises with his terms is the impossibility of "direct" experience of the *noumenon*, of the "space" understood as "outside". Land's greatest philosophical ambition is to cross the boundary that separates the two poles, "inside" and "outside", to find means by which the "outside" elements can enter "inside" without their multiplicity, their complexity, their radical otherness, being eliminated by any "internal" mechanisms.

The postulation of the transcendental relation between phenomena and things in themselves gives rise to multiple positions towards the Kantian project, some of them positive¹, and others negative². The Landian interpretation belongs to the latter camp, repudiating Kantian critical philosophy³ on the grounds that it limits human cognition to the phenomenal realm: "[i]t is inherent to critique that a terrain of unthinkability is delineated, or that limits are set to the exercise of theoretical endeavor" (*TfA* 6). The *noumenon*, the 'thing-in-itself', is an epistemological limit, because human reason cannot, in the Kantian system, come to know such an object in its entirety. In a typically anthropocentric move, man, confronted with such a limit, tries to seize it and re-functionalize it for his own purposes, transforming the human rational capacity to approximate the knowledge of the *noumenon* through its phenomena into an ontological apex.

Since human reason cannot know the *noumenon*, whatever might lie behind this concept is of little relevance, just as any different entity encountered that seems to be producing disturbances in the rational system is sooner or later cataloged through the transcendental filter (Land, *Fanged Noumena* 71). Kant himself uses a maritime metaphor to describe this process whereby reason, well-grounded with the aid of its transcendental capacities, seeks to ward off the perils of illusions that might come its way:

It is the land of truth (a charming name), surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also bring to an end. (*Critique of Pure Reason* 354)

But what would happen if, hypothetically, people were to refuse the caution and stability of reason and fall prey to the temptation of the ocean waves, if they were to fall prey to the "passion for the cyclone" (Land, *TfA* 105)? In other, less figurative terms, Land's proposal

1 See, in this regard, Sellars' reading of Kant as a philosopher as intersubjectivity.

2 See Meillassoux, for his critique of "correlationism".

3 In addition to "transcendental idealism", Kant's philosophy is also known as "critical philosophy", and other uses of this term hereafter will implicitly refer to Kantian philosophy.

is to favor speculation outside the rational limits imposed by transcendental idealism. In this sense, following the conceptualization of the “thing-in-itself” as the limit of thought, Land believes that the *noumenon* is “the absence of the subject, and is thus inaccessible in principle to experience” (*TfA* 110). Carrying this line of thought further, Land arrives at the hypothesis that the very absence of the subject, and thus, in a certain sense, the *noumenon*, is death itself: “Kant does not deny that pure consciousness is oblivion, death, or the subject in itself—which is to say that it is nothing (=0)—he simply evades the issue, implicitly consigning it to the imagination” (*TfA* 117). If, then, it is the tendency towards death that brings the subject closer to the *noumenon*, and not the accumulation of reason, “experience is not given in reality as knowledge, but as collapse” (*TfA* 116). Once the question of death as the supposed identity of the *noumenon* is introduced, we can also begin to construct a theoretical argument that accounts for the reason Land proposes Bataille as a leading exponent of a philosophical alternative to the continental Kantian tradition.

Bataille is a philosopher completely uninterested in the stability offered by Kant’s ‘land of truth’, with his attention instead directed towards forms of collapse, towards processes that destabilize the so-called rational security of transcendental logic. Moreover, Bataille can also be seen as a philosopher of evil, “of an evil that will always be the name for those processes that flagrantly violate all human utility, all accumulative reason, all stability and all sense” (Land, *TfA* 59). Although there are situations in which the “evil” Bataille proposes is not at all acceptable and is in every respect atrocious (*TfA* 58-75), the refusal to accept “cumulative reason” can also be seen as a refusal to accept the Kantian normativity imposed on the adequacy of representations to phenomena. In other words, instead of legitimizing a reason that must always conform to the accumulation of logical, rational and supposedly rigid motivations, Bataille militates for the collapse of reason and for the experimentation and acceptance of “expenditure”.

The tutelary figure of Bataille’s philosophy is the sun. Seen from a certain, clichéd perspective, the mention of the sun in the context of collapse may seem strange, an image generally presumed to be more akin to a Kantian type of reason. The clichéd perspective would conceptualize the sun as the standard of the accumulation of reason, because “[t]he sun is the pure illumination that would be simultaneous with truth, the perfect solidarity of knowing with the real, the identity of exteriority and its manifestation” (Land, *TfA* 28), and from a political perspective, the sun would circumscribe utopian projects about the future (Timofeeva 2–3). Bataille, however, relies in his philosophy on doubling this “utopian” perspective of the sun with a “dystopian” perspective, in which the beneficent sun has an evil, black double, from which “we receive not illumination but disease, for whatever it squanders on us we are fated to squander in turn” (*TfA* 29).

As humans, “we are nothing but an effect of the sun” (Bataille, *The Limit of the Useful* 138). However, the sun that Bataille has in mind is not the pure sun, but the evil

one, which gives people an excess of energy that they are obliged to spend in various ways (Timofeeva 61). One can already see here the rudiments of Bataille’s economics, which he calls, against the “political economy”, a “general economy” or “base economy”. The whole idea of “general economy” is based on the excess or surplus of energy created by the sun and given to humans. Bataille makes an important optical shift in his general economy from the emphasis that most modern economic schools place on the unequal distribution of resources, caused by the initial scarcity of those resources, to an emphasis on the excess of energy by which humans manage to produce and process any initial resources. The modern corollary of humankind’s recognition of this excess is its terrestrial storage, in various forms, such as “production, labor, seriousness, exchange or scarcity” (Land, *TfA* 33), thus it makes for a tacit acceptance of the precepts of political economy. Although he acknowledges the impossibility of the existence of a “solar civilization” in the long term, Bataille finds in the ancient Aztec civilization a possible precursor of his ideas through sacrificial practices and military aggression towards geographical neighbors (*TfA* 32), both possible solutions for “expending” excess solar energy.

Bataille’s “general economy” can also be seen as a counterpoint to the logic of accumulative capitalism. For Land, this bourgeois logic, which obliges the accumulation of capital, is mirrored at the philosophical level by Kant’s philosophy (*TfA* 3) and by Enlightenment philosophy in a broader sense (*Fanged Noumena* 55–81). Enlightenment philosophy makes a pact with capital because it reflects, at the level of philosophical discourse, the need to accumulate ever more perfectible arguments about the surrounding reality, thus trying to eliminate “illusions” and false rationales. On the economic and social level, the bourgeoisie similarly sought to accumulate as much wealth as possible and to protect it, avoiding spending capital in ways that might jeopardize the logic of accumulation (*TfA* 57). Instead of protecting and accumulating capital, “general economy” is about accepting the solar human nature, promoting excess, and spending it in an irrational way, because “[t]he truth of the sun at the peak of its prodigal glory is the *necessity of useless waste*, where the celestial and the base conspire in the eclipse of rational moderation” (*TfA* 30). At the opposite pole to the binomial “capitalist economy”—“Kantian philosophy”, Land proposes the binomial “general economy”—“libidinal materialism”.

Libidinal Materialism

Libidinal materialism is Nick Land’s first major philosophical contribution. In his conceptualization of libidinal materialism, Land combines Bataille’s ideas of ‘general economy’ and ‘base matter’ with various variations on the Freudian ‘drive’ (*Trieb*), to which he adds a thermodynamic dimension. In what follows I will use the terms “base matter”

and “libidinal matter” interchangeably, because Land, in turn, uses them synonymously throughout *TfA*—the only difference arises when discussing “libidinal *materialism*”, which differs in several points from Bataille’s “base materialism”.

For Bataille, base matter is the solar energetic excess that precedes (temporally) and exceeds (logically) human attempts to rationally represent and conceptualize phenomena. Base matter cannot be fully assimilated into human ontology and epistemology, because it is “external and foreign to ideal human aspirations”, and therefore “refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations” (Bataille, *Visions of Excess* 51). One of the ways in which Bataille, however, defines basic matter is as “non-logical difference” (*Visions of Excess* 121), i.e., as a residue that escapes logical operations and could only be approximated as a difference from what is caught in rational concepts. Being the prerogative of a difference definable primarily apodictically, i.e., by negation and not by postulating positive propositions, base matter (or libidinal matter, as Land calls it) lends itself to a processual reading, involving “a process of mutation which is simultaneously devoid of agency and irreducible to the causal chain” (*TfA* 41).

Although energetic in a quasi-Freudian sense, libidinal matter differs from energy defined in simple thermodynamic terms, because the former is “chaotic, or pre-ontological” (Land, *TfA* 43), while the latter, thermodynamic, is subject to “ontological aspirations” and can be controlled, in local contexts, by humans. However, in attempting to outline a theory of libidinal matter, Land resorts to thermodynamics, appropriating some ideas from this field of study. The theory of a libidinal matter is developed by Land by means of four thermodynamic conceptual resources: “chance”, “tendency”, “energy” and “information”.

“Chance” is perhaps the most transparent of the four thermodynamic terms, and refers to the fact that libidinal matter has no predetermined direction, moving only on the precepts of hazard, chance, “becoming” (*TfA* 43). “Tendency” replaces what in older representational schemes was called purpose, or “teleological schemes” (*TfA* 43)—instead of a stable energetic path that would contribute to the attainment of a goal, libidinal matter responds to impulses, and indulges in “tendencies” subject to constant change. By “energy” Land denotes the approach of a probabilistic perspective (as is suggested, in fact, by all four properties), not concerned with fixed quantities, but with approximations: “essences dissolve into impermanent configurations of energy” (*TfA* 43). If “chance” was the most transparent concept attached to libidinal matter, “information” is the most opaque. In short, “information” is a unification of the three aforementioned concepts, but this time put at the service of attacking the normativity of rational judgments. In a move similar to post-structuralism⁴, information combats adequacy to a stable reason, proposing the extension of

4 See Geoghegan for the historical and conceptual filiations between computer/cybernetic theory and structuralism/post-structuralism.

probabilistic principles to those cultural elements whose function had previously remained unquestioned. Thus, “signs, thoughts, ideologies, cultures, dreams” all become “suddenly intelligible as natural forces, as negentropies” (*TfA* 43)—in other words, even these elements listed by Land, normally seen as immaterial, have a possible libidinal materialist ascendancy over reality. This conceptualization of libidinal matter in terms of information also occasions a possible Marxist critique of the anti-physicalist conception of Landian materialism. By accepting the supposed material efficiency of “signs, thoughts, etc.” Land relativizes and diminishes the actual impact of economic policies and changes, falling into a counter-revolutionary trap vis-à-vis anti-capitalist movements. I will return to this critique in the next section on the differences between libidinal materialism and historical materialism.

In order to get from thermodynamic theory back to libidinal materialism, it is necessary to introduce a concept that Land takes literally from Freud, but which also finds echoes in Bataille’s central ideas, namely the “death drive” (“*Todestrieb*” in German). In Freud’s words, the “death drive” is “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things” (30), an uncontrollable feeling of humans to return to an inorganic state, prior to life proper. More than mere Freudian speculation, Land sees the “death drive” legitimized within thermodynamics as well, particularly through the idea of entropy, the tendency of physical systems to move towards disorganization, “motion is a perpetual degradation of energy” (*TfA* 43). With the introduction of the idea of the “death drive”, the identification Land makes between the experience of death and the Kantian *noumenon* becomes clearer, since both represent limits that human cognition cannot reach literally, but towards which it naturally tends. Moreover, the uncontrollable expenditure of excess, which Bataille had placed at the center of his general economy, is also understood, then, as an effect of man’s natural drive towards death—what becomes strange in this equation is the stagnation, the refusal of the drive towards death and, therefore, the attempt at accumulation. The imaginary of excessive violence, sacrifice, contagion, and waste that Land takes over from Bataille is then explainable, because if “Kantian epistemology wants to know the world not as it is, but as it is *for us*”, then “libidinal materialism wants to experience the world in all its awesome, destructive glory” (Heft 219).

Possible political criticisms of libidinal materialism

The processuality and instability of libidinal matter produces certain difficulties when its precepts are used to arrive at a political conception. Not only because “matter as difference is never stable, and can never remain trapped within the closure of philosophy” (Noys, “Georges Bataille’s Base Materialism” 515), but also because politics do not seem to be more open to experimenting with excess and the death drive. The main problem would

be the fact that libidinal materialism (but also Bataille's base materialism) postulates an infinite state of revolt against whatever norms would be implemented over time within a society. Moreover, continuing Bataille's ideas of excess and sacrifice, Land does not seem to envision this state of revolt as a peaceful one, but on the contrary, the revolt he proposes is an aggressive one, violently and continuously attacking the *status quo*: "revolution is not a means but an absolute end, and society collapses towards post-bourgeois community not through growth, but in sacrificial festivity" (*TfA* 55). Seen in the context of the 1990s and its so-called "reflexive impotence" (Fisher 21) to imagine a non-capitalist future that emerges in that period, the re-emergence of Bataille's ideas through Nick Land can also be understood as an effort to propose a radical, if aggressive, new imagination of anti-capitalist revolt. At the same time, libidinal matter is both prone to relativization, as mentioned above, and to an instability that makes its entrapment in an inherently political context or discourse impossible, a case which might even produce the opposite of the desired effects: "Bataille is in danger of producing an 'inverted materialism' that claims to be shattering all values but which actually sets up a new set of 'low' proletarian values (filth, expenditure, virility, violence, etc.) against 'high' bourgeois values (propriety, profit, production, etc.)" (Noys, "Georges Bataille's Base Materialism" 507).

In addition to the libertarian problem of infinite revolt, several passages in *TfA* devoted to libidinal materialism seem to prefigure one of the central problematics of all Landian thought, namely the infinite deterritorializing capacity of capital. The accumulation of capital and its philosophical double, transcendental idealism, are the driving forces behind the constitution of the bourgeoisie, the social class that seeks to deny the importance of spending excess solar energy and to proclaim the primacy of storing financial energy, thus giving birth to the modern, capitalist epoch. However, capital as such is nothing other than a libidinal matter which, freed from the limits imposed on it by the bourgeoisie, could usher in an age of excess in the sense of Bataille's terms. According to Land, the disappearance of the processes that govern capital in the contemporary world (however pro- or anti-capitalist they may be) would reveal the true, Bataille's, destructive functions of capital — "capital breaks us down and reconstructs us, with increasing frequency, as it pursues its energetic fluctuation towards annihilation, driven to the liberation of the sun, whilst the object hurtles into the vaporization of proto-schizophrenic commodification" (*TfA* 119). A supposed exercise of imagination as to the consequences of this "liberation" of capital would only lead to the scenario of the complete annihilation of humanity, but in Land's inhuman philosophy, for whom death = *noumenon* = pure consciousness, annihilation takes on "positive" connotations.

In a sense, Land's libidinal materialism in *TfA* is an incipient, *in nuce* variant of the inhumanist philosophy he would develop throughout his career. This materialism can be seen as an instantiation of a counteraction to capitalism through what Benjamin Noys

calls “*politiques du pire*”: “if capitalism generates its own forces of dissolution then the necessity is to radicalize capitalism itself: the worse the better” (*Persistence of the Negative* 5). Specific to Land’s early period of thought, and thus implicit in *TfA*, is a still anti-capitalist élan. Although he criticizes and emphasizes, on various occasions, certain aspects that he sees problematic in Marxism (*TfA* 55), simultaneously flirting with the libidinal energy of capital, Land’s broader political project in this text is an anti-capitalist one, proposing “general economics” and “libidinal materialism” as solutions to the problems of unequal accumulation and distribution of resources under capitalism.

Key Landian appropriations from the Bataillean lexicon

It is important to discuss, in this final section, certain terms that Land appropriates from Bataille, and which circumscribe ways of spreading the philosophy of “general economy” and “libidinal materialism”. I address here, mainly, the terms “contagion” (and other terms in the semantic field of disease), “collapse” and “Zero”. Although, in later texts, Land modifies, to a greater or lesser extent, the original meanings of these terms, sometimes to the point of erasing the Bataillean filiations they have, I believe that discussing them at this point may facilitate their understanding in most of the situations where Land utilizes them.

None of the above three terms denote elements in themselves, but, given that Land’s theory is a predominantly processualist one, all terms refer to a process by which human reasoning moves away from its anthropocentric biases, ultimately adhering to a “becoming-human” (*TfA* 125). The first step of the contagion would be to give up transcendental, rationalizing pretensions about the surrounding phenomena. To this end, an anti-Kantian philosophy is needed, one that promotes other principles, and for Land, Bataille’s philosophy is the most appropriate (at this point in his writings), because “Bataille does not transmit a philosophy, but rather a delirious negative gospel: ‘death can be *tasted*’” (*TfA* 80). Not rationalized, not scientifically understood, but “tasted”—death, the experience of “pure consciousness”, lies outside any rational way of understanding. Virulence is the first necessary impulse to engage in a labor of renunciation of reason, proposing the experimentation of other, more eccentric, modes of cognition.

“Collapse” is the figure of expenditure, of the acceptance of solar nature and the negative imperative that springs from this acceptance. “Expenditure is irreducibly ruinous because it is not merely useless, but also contagious” and “nothing is more infectious than the passion for collapse” (*TfA* 65), in other words, the passion for the renunciation of the subsumable norms of bourgeois society. Collapse is the opposite of the zenith of accumulation, or, to resort again to Kant’s maritime metaphor, it is collapse that reveals the corrosive potential of the subterranean lakes of the “land of truth”. Any form of rationalization, rigidization

or “ossification [...] is a unilateral deviation from fluidity, so that even bones, laws, and monuments are crumbled and swept away by the deep flows of the Earth” (*TfA* 128).

First the virulent force of a de-anthropomorphizing philosophy, then the collapse into non-rational flows, and, ultimately, “Zero”: the “the vortex of a becoming inhuman that lures desire out from the cage of man onto the open expanses of death” (*TfA* 125). Zero is not the end of the inhuman process, but an even greater intensification of this process, a final recognition of the primacy of difference over unity (usually signified by “one”, which also functions as a substitute to denote the principle of identity). Zero is the anti-teleology of excess, the solar imperative that obliges humanity to accumulate nothing and to expend absolutely whatever energy it receives. Zero can also represent complete absence, death—“life is ejected from the energy-blank and smeared as a crust upon chaotic zero, a mold upon death” (*TfA* 47).

“To conclude is not merely erroneous, but ugly”

As signaled by the Landian intertext (*Fanged Noumena* 174) chosen as a sub-heading, what follows is not a conclusion *per se*, but mostly some directions for future research which could accompany the insights excavated by the present article. The most important axis of inquiries opened by Land in *TfA*, which he will follow in the majority of his ulterior writings, is that of an alternative to what he sees as the limitations imposed by the acceptance of Kant’s epistemological ideas concerning the relationship between *phenomena* (“Inside”) and *noumena* (“Outside”). The ambivalence of this radical search for a way of directly accessing the “outside” can already be intuited from Land’s approximation of the experience of death with the experience of the *noumenon*, discussed all throughout *TfA*. Land’s “*noumenal* quest” forces him to renounce all of the humanist principles ushered in by Kantian philosophy, instead opting for an “inhumanism” which marginalizes, in an almost cosmic manner, the importance of the human species. Although followed mainly on a theoretical level in *TfA*, Landian “inhumanism” becomes problematic when, in later texts, it becomes the central point of politics. In many of the texts collected in *Fanged Noumena*, Land misconstrues Deleuze&Guattari’s call to “deterritorialize” the *socius* in an overtly pro-capitalist way, positioning capital as the sole catalyst for change (319–345). Capital not only deterritorializes the social sphere, but also the “cognitive” one, forcing humans to start acknowledging the constraints imposed by Kantian rationality. The present article attempted to highlight the genesis of Landian interests with “inhumanist” philosophy by tracing his engagement with some of Georges Bataille’s most important ideas, such as “expenditure”, “base matter”, “solar energy” etc. Spending too much time under the corrosive flares of Bataille’s “dark sun” has proven to be “effective” for Land, whose entire philosophical

energy has been expended towards escaping the clausturation of transcendental idealism and reclaiming a radical gateway into the “Outside”.

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