

Robin Mackay: URBANOMIC

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Urbanomic is a publishing company that began in 2006 when I printed the first volume of what I called a 'journal of philosophical research and development', Collapse. We are now just about to publish volume VII, and Urbanomic has also made other publications, been involved in arts events, commissions and residencies. But the core of Urbanomic remains Collapse, because it is through my editorial work in Collapse that we have been able to build a growing network of people – philosophers, theorists, contemporary artists, scientists – who are equally enthusiastic about the concepts behind Collapse and want to get involved, and who in turn introduce me to others who share the same spirit.

SLIDE 2: ALL COLLAPSE COVERS

I'd like to talk about Collapse – how it came about, how it has developed, and the way in which it works.

With Collapse, for me, Philosophy is a form of – it would be presumptuous of me to say it is an art practice, but a *creative* practice, a practice of *making, making things*. Somehow Collapse has been a way of finding my way back to realizing that even in philosophy one is making things. Louis Althusser, to my mind one of the thinkers who has most penetratingly examined what it means to do philosophy, acknowledged this: In Pierre Macherey's words: 'That philosophy is a discursive affair, means materially that it "does" nothing except align words in a certain order, producing statements,' – philosophy is, in the last instance, a material practice. But it is also material in wider ways: one produces books, travels to conferences, one is linked to a global network of other people via the internet, etc. all of these are material constructions which lend structure to the way that philosophy is done today. One of the aims of Collapse is to affirm and celebrate this rather than to be self-denying and ashamed about it.

In order to admit, to reveal, to celebrate the fact that thinking philosophically is about making things, one has to take an attitude toward the subject that could be called off-centre, eccentric, or peripheral. To think around the edges and across boundaries. So that I am constrained to begin with the question: Is it possible any longer for there to be peripheral thought in an academic discipline such as philosophy? In any case, most people probably think, with some justification, that philosophy is long dead: all the classic 'big questions' about how the universe works have been answered in cosmology and physics; the most powerful ways of thinking about the nature of life and the nature of cognition now belong to biology and cognitive science; and on the other hand questions about the way in which humans relate to each other, to time, to

space, and to the world have been skilfully and accessibly interrogated by modern and contemporary artists. Indeed conceptual and post-conceptual art seem, for better *and* worse, to have colonized the space of philosophy whilst philosophy has retreated into academic isolation.

So it could well appear that philosophical questions are alive everywhere except in philosophy departments. Unfortunately I think many inhabitants of the latter have quiescently internalised this sense of diminished importance. What should be the most speculative, the most transversal of all disciplines of thought, ends up as a moribund battleground of partisans of this or that school of thought, who won't or can't talk to each other. Entrenched positions, mutual suspicion, office politics, all the usual neuroses and jealousies of the academy. Even when the ramifications of philosophical positions are radical and far-reaching, philosophers think that it's not their business to pursue those extra-philosophical consequences.

Ultimately this means that underlying intellectual assumptions are not questioned because to do so might jeopardise research grants or disrupt hierarchies. Such are the facts as to the materiality of philosophical thought as it exists in the world today. Not to mention the disastrous tendency in the last decade or so continually to measure the so-called 'performance' of research departments, so that staff are constantly under pressure to publish. Under these kind of pressures, it's hard to see how within the university the freedom can be found to ask challenging philosophical questions, to sharpen the cutting edge of thought, to work on the periphery. Because the peripheral questions are by definition those that connect philosophy to its outside; they are, therefore, a threat to the security of the discipline. A discipline which, on the contrary, is constrained jealously to police its boundaries and to consolidate its little kingdom.

All this is just so much moaning, of course; but Collapse was first of all about transforming this personal dissatisfaction into a public, positive, gesture – and a potentially embarrassing and humiliating gesture! For a while, for all the reasons enumerated above, I thought about abandoning the term 'philosophy' altogether, and calling Collapse a journal of 'fundamental research' – but I think philosophy is worth fighting for, bloody-mindedly.

SLIDE: COLLAPSE + PAGES?

So, the best way to introduce Collapse is as a strange combination between a philosophy journal, a fanzine – that is, a rather personal, idiosyncratic, non-

commercial and non-academic publication; and an ongoing art project – the making of a work through the assemblage of other people's work.

For this reason, I won't be able to offer any advice or insight into professional publishing, since Collapse and Urbanomic have only become professional, or semi-professional, by a happy accident. What was a genuine experiment, has become an experimental success.

However, what I would like to present are certain models of editing or curation that have become retrospectively clear to me, and which I believe are the cause for this unexpected success, both in the academic world – which was exactly the world that Collapse set out to escape – and the art world – of which, when I began making Collapse, I knew very little.

What I will talk about bears upon the content, mode of distribution, and commercial aspects of what Collapse has achieved, and as I have already mentioned, I would consider all of these different aspects as equally important to the project.

Throughout the presentation I will introduce a series of terms, that I have come to see as the crucial keystones of the project.

This model that I will describe, which has emerged gradually through my ongoing reflection on what began as a very personal project, has developed over the years I have been publishing Collapse, but it has its basis in the impulses that drove me to create the journal in the first place.

SLIDE: NEGATIVE TASK / POSITIVE VISION

These were really twofold, consisting of a negative task, and a positive vision. But the negative side, also, was positive! As I described, I wanted to create something positive out of my frustration with academia. It seemed to me that the institutional structure of academia led to most people retreating to partisan positions, to defending their turf. And academic journals tended to construct themselves around a very narrow area of interest, with specialists who all know one another. I have nothing against specialists, I think the most obscure specialist knowledge is the most fascinating. But I didn't see any publications which had a will to bring together specialists from different disciplines, to share knowledge, which had the ambition to

find or create links between people who, otherwise, would never meet each other, and to use philosophy to do this. For me, this seemed like a part of the task of philosophy: to discover ways of mediating, or modulating, or mixing, different areas of knowledge about the world. I didn't find that in the academic world, where philosophy had become just another specialism.

SLIDE: JOURNAL

The normal model of a journal might be understood as defining a discursive space into which all contributions have to fit, a criteria which all the contents have to follow:

SLIDE: GLOBAL MODEL

This I think reflects the structure of the university itself:

The ambition of the university has always been to reconstruct, for each new generation, a global sphere of knowledge, within which sub-disciplines and their interactions are well defined.

SLIDE: GLOBAL MODEL + INTERDISCIPLINARITY

There has been, of course, in recent years, a trend towards interdisciplinary activity, but this tends to be a secondary thing, only reconfirming the disciplines in their autonomy. Interdisciplinarity still clings to the edges of the confined spheres of knowledge.

SLIDE: INTERDISCIPLINARITY

So this was one of the motives: to find a new model that would introduce more imaginative links between researchers working in different fields, and outside academia too. That would make thought move in a different way.

SLIDE: LIGHTNING

The other problem with academic journals is that there is a process of homogenisation: you submit a paper, it is reviewed and returned, you submit it again, and after maybe a year it is published, by which time, in many cases, all the contents of the journal have really been flattened down to the same level. So there is a mechanism whereby the journal as institution ensures a homogeneity that contributes to this model I am discussing.

I was also interested in hearing from people who were working on new research that wasn't necessarily finished or conclusive, to publish work that gave an insight into the *process* of research, that showed thinking in progress, rather than conclusions; and that also showed how this thinking was at work in the world, how it wasn't simply academics doing armchair philosophizing. That there are *productions* of thought, whether in the work of artists, or of scientists, architects, and so on: that thought *produces*. This is the idea behind calling it a 'journal of research AND development'. A term borrowed from industry to provoke the 'intellectual industry'.

SLIDE: ADD 'RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT'

SLIDE: POSITIVE + NEGATIVE TASK

And finally, another important aspect of this 'negative' task of Collapse: there were, in philosophy, several people I knew who were doing important work which I could see were unlikely to be published in any journal because it simply didn't fit any of the disciplinary criteria. And one of the things I am most proud of is introducing authors such as Reza Negarestani and Quentin Meillassoux, who have since gone on to attain wide recognition, and are now being invited to contribute to other journals, so there has been a sort of infection process there, where the wider world has had to accept the 'rogue elements' introduced by Collapse.

So, the question – in order to turn this 'negative task' into something positive – was how – in what form – could one make some kind of positive gesture rather than merely bemoaning this state of affairs. Here, in order to be entirely honest about the process, I would have to mention a very personal vision of what I would like to create. As writers always say, you write the book you'd like to read; well, I wanted to edit the kind of journal I'd like to read. Although at this point I had no idea whether anyone else would want to read it!

I remember very vividly as a child how it felt to have a book that felt utterly compendious, that felt like it was too huge, had too much in it, to ever read it, to ever exhaust its contents.

SLIDE: ANNUALS

An encyclopedia, or one of the 'annuals' that we used to get for Christmas, which were filled with a miscellany of cartoons, puzzles, and stories. As a child one would pore over this repeatedly throughout the Christmas holiday (I guess they were invented to keep children quiet after they got bored of their new toys!); and I remember distinctly that when reading, I would deliberately miss out some of the pages so that I could then 'discover' them later. Projected from this experience was the idea of a book that was inexhaustible, which you could return to and discover new connections that you didn't see before, and in which different types of content followed one another.

There was something about this compendiousness, the uneven nature of having many different types of content, and the inexhaustibility, that I wanted to reproduce. And – to bring these 'negative' and 'positive' aspects together – the ultimate question for me was: why, in a world that produces such an incredible variety of knowledge, such mindbending speculations, and so many different ways of looking at the world, so many modes of production – why doesn't any of the theoretical literature reflect this, why is it intent on reproducing this banal, sober, local model of knowledge, of rationality?

So Collapse Volume I was conceived, as it says on the back cover of the first volume, as

SLIDE: COLLAPSE I BACK COVER TEXT

"A meticulously compiled and compendious miscellany, a grimoire or instruction manual without referent, as a delirious carnival of sobriety, *Collapse* operates its war against good sense not through romantic flight but through the formal insanity secreted in the depths of the rational ("the rational is not reasonable").

Collapse aims to force unforeseen conjunctions, singular correspondences, and unnatural cross-fertilisations; to diagram abstract regions as yet unnamed."

On the other hand, I have to say that I have always had an aversion to the model of the 'cabinet of curiosities': I didn't want this simply to be a random selection of items for the reader's amusement. And the cabinet of curiosities is a certain genre to itself, which comes with its own expectations, and which I think can be equally limiting to the traditional journal model.

SLIDE: ADD 'CONSISTENCY'

Although I didn't want it to be flat and homogeneous, the assembly of all the contributions had to attain a kind of consistency, there had to be a strong logic to hold it together. It's like making a soup where you need the ingredients simultaneously to blend, to each hold their own flavour, and to interact, producing something new. And the way I have tried to achieve this in Collapse is by theming each volume, but by treating the theme in a maximally broad way; and crucially, by allowing the theme to 'drift' a little during the editing, so that it ends up including ingredients that even the cook didn't expect.

SLIDE: COLLAPSE 1 + CONTENTS

So, this first volume was entitled 'numerical materialism', and included an interview with Alain Badiou, along with an article on numerology, a long interview with a mathematician about prime numbers and physics, a piece by the Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani developing a mathematical model of terrorism, another interview with a philosopher who tries to calculate the probabilities of disastrous planetary events, some artwork by a Chicago artist Keith Tiford which speaks of multiplicity and crowds...

So I would just stop there to emphasise a few things:

1. The importance of the interview – I think the interview is a much underused form: an interview allows a certain magical combination of informality and drift, and structure (because it is reviewed and edited afterwards, and the results almost always come as a surprise to the interviewee);

SLIDE: ROBERTO TROTTA.

For instance, in Collapse II, two articles by philosophers discuss the philosophical problem concerning scientific statements about, for example, how the universe was millions of years ago, before there was anyone around to be conscious of it, before there was life, consciousness, or language. If we insist – as many modern philosophers have – that any statement can only be a statement about how things are manifest *for us*, ultimately dependent upon the terms of some cognitive, social or linguistic consensus, then we deprive ourselves of all that science can tell us about the world: it's a kind of catastrophic divorce between science and philosophy. So how

are we to understand these statements about a universe without us? Quentin Meillassoux puts forward a fairly clear philosophical position on this, but we also interviewed in the same volume a scientist called Roberto Trotta, who is a theoretical cosmologist at Oxford University working on the problem of Dark Matter. I think we spent 4 or 5 hours interviewing him, and the interview in Collapse II stretches to 80 pages, it's absolutely fascinating and really sheds light on how a scientist, in his everyday practice, does encounter these philosophical problems and develops his own apparatus for dealing with them. This is one thing that I'd insist upon, which is key for Collapse: everyone thinks philosophically, everyone creates concepts in their work, whether they're an artist, a scientist, or whatever: and philosophy has to be porous, it has to be able to connect with science and the arts in order to avoid this kind of catastrophic divorce from the world, this kind of self-enforced autism.

Also, with regard to the interviews, I have to say that part of this is that I invariably approach them from a point of view of ignorance, of knowing nothing – it's frustrating when interviewees already know what they need to hear and the answers they want to hear. This is why interviews in magazines are usually so tedious. For me, I usually conduct one interview from the point of view of knowing nothing, and then return later for a second session when I have had a chance to transcribe the first and ask some more intelligent questions! But it seems to work well ...

2. These ideas would never 'meet' each other usually; to take again the case of Collapse II, In Quentin's article he develops his philosophical solution to the problem I have briefly outlined. It involves a new philosophical conception of time: in another article in Collapse II, the Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani explains that there is no notion of apocalypse as such in Islamic theology, because in a sense God itself is apocalypse: The Islamic god, Negarestani argues, the god who cannot be imagined, pictured or spoken, the god who is experienced in the exhaustion and emptiness of the desert, offers us a way of philosophically thinking something which is outside all relation, and something in which all laws and relations break down. Rather than the Christian conception of apocalypse as teleological terminus, therefore, one has a conception of time as immediate and continual apocalypse, and this is very similar to the model of time that Meillassoux describes. Then the artist Kristen Alvanson contributes a photo essay about graveyards in the middle-east, and which touches on the aspects of Islamic thought that affect the way in which the graves are constructed, very unlike western graves. So there is this weird thread leading through

the volume, which connects together Ancient Persian graveyards, theology, cosmology, and the philosophy of time.

So, before these volumes existed, these strange journeys of thought had, I would guess, never been made! And all concerned had to have the right spirit to participate – although they never really got the choice because they only saw the volume when it was already a *fait accompli*!

SLIDE: J+D CHAPMAN: ADD 'FORCED COLLABORATION / INTERRUPTED RELAY'

This is what I mean by 'forced collaboration'. This is an idea I came across when I was talking with the artists Jake and Dinos Chapman, who contributed to Collapse VI. As you know, all of their work is collaborative, but Jake told me that for their drawings, they very rarely sit in the same room together. Usually, he will draw something, and leave it, then Dinos comes in the next day and scribbles on it and then leaves it behind ... and so on.

So there is the idea here that you take work from one person, and insert it into this alien context, and then give something back to them. It's like a relay, in which there is not 'collaboration' in the sense of people working together, but there is people's work *being worked together*.

3. Collapse includes work by contributors at different 'levels' – from seasoned academics to people who have never been published before. And texts of different types – from the very abstract and demanding to the more conversational and accessible – are treated equally.

4, and lastly, the very personal nature of the thing – I don't have pretensions to be an artist, and I give full credit to the individual contributors, but I can only describe Collapse itself as a work made by me and for which I take responsibility, since all of the contributions are focussed through me and through the editorial process. This involves a keeping a certain vagueness or looseness in place, whilst trying to maintain rigorously the object, which is to create a consistent but heterogeneous mix – so that the final product not only mixes things together, but also produces something new, that can feed back into each of the contributors' research and practice.

SLIDE: ADD 'INTEGRITY'

This idea of the *integrity* of the thing is very important, and it is also the reason why Collapse is a physical and not a virtual journal. There is a certain commitment involved here: as editor, I commit myself to presenting these contributions, physically bound together, and make the statement, or the wager, that together they produce something new and significant.

With the first volume it was really a step in the dark, there was of course the possibility of total embarrassment and humiliation. But I think that commitment is important, and that's why (and many people have asked this question) Collapse is not an online project. I simply don't think that, when you create something online, you attain that kind of integrity and that kind of commitment, you don't create a *whole* in the same way. And I hope that it will become clear why this idea of creating an integral whole, and its being focussed by one person, is not by any means the *opposite* of creating networks, connections, rhizomes or whatever; I think that the two things are really important to each other – and that the one is the most potent means to the other.

So this first volume was created very much as an experiment on the basis of those driving passions about what needed to be overcome, and a model – really, a very intuitive and vague, imaginative, even childish, model – of the form it might take. The idea was to bring together philosophers, theorists, contemporary artists, scientists, to create these themed discussions – or 'forced collaborations' – on very broad themes, and in this way to make thought move and produce something new.

I'll now just look briefly about some of the volumes we have published since then, to expand on how the idea has grown and developed.

SLIDE: Vol II

In volume II we introduced two philosophers, Ray Brassier and Quentin Meillassoux, who were proposing what they called a 'Speculative Realism'.

SLIDE: Vol III

In Collapse III, actually centred on the work of Deleuze, we published as an appendix the proceedings of a symposium at Goldsmiths Feb 2007 in London by this title.

SLIDE: Vol III Spec Real opening pages.

This proved to be one of the most significant articles in Collapse, because Speculative Realism was really well-aligned with what I have said about Collapse: it was a group of young philosophers who were really tired of the orthodoxies that had grown up in the 90s, and were looking to open up philosophical thought beyond a perceived institutional exhaustion – in many cases through a new dialogue with the sciences. And they wouldn't have easily been published in any of the traditional places. And really this began a massive movement, which was primarily spread through online sites, through blogs, etc. and that became a vector across which Collapse was disseminated. The art world also began to take an interest in this, as well as people working in areas as diverse as geography, ecology, physics, feminism. And so there has been this synergy between a demand for new thinking in philosophy, discovered by the idea of 'speculative realism', and Collapse as a vehicle for it.

Vol IV

The subtitle of volume 4 is 'Concept Horror'. It explores the link between philosophical thought and horror – in the sense that many of the conclusions one can come to through *rational* thought are not at all '*reasonable*': they are rational, but at the same time rather horrifying, much like Meillassoux's argument on time. Most of the time we keep such thoughts at bay by simply considering them abstractly: for instance I 'know' that my entire body is made of mindless, endlessly interchanging particles, but I don't let that affect my everyday life...! But it's interesting that in film, in fiction, and in the work artists, an attempt is made to force the audience to really *feel* these outlandish thoughts – especially in pulp fiction and film: So that literature and art are the places where the conclusions of abstract thought become realised as affective, emotional. For me this is one of the most interesting functions of art in relation to philosophy: to dramatise concepts, so they can be *felt*.

One of the centrepieces of this volume, for me, is an essay by a postgraduate, James Trafford, who shows discusses a new book by a philosopher of neuroscience, Thomas Metzinger. Metzinger's argument is that there is no such thing as a self. He

shows how the very rigorous argument of Metzinger is prefigured step-by-step in the work of a horror writer, Thomas Ligotti – so, in this case, the relation is reversed, and what the artist has already turned into a fictional experience of the horrific loss of self, is later theorised and linked to what we know about the brain's structure. Thomas Ligotti himself writes in the volume, but he contributed a philosophical essay, so you have philosophers writing about horror stories, and the horror story's author writing philosophy. And incidentally in volume 5 we went on to interview Thomas Metzinger himself.

George Sieg writes about how horror is linked closely to xenophobia, and how the most heightened form of xenophobia is the fear of the other within, the fear, in fact, which drove nazism to try and purify the german population. Elsewhere in the volume the czech art collective Rafani present some work called 'czech forest', * * * which deals with the way in which after the war, the czech people turned savagely on the germans living in the sudetenland, in a kind of relay of this xenophobia. I think there is an intricate line, or more than one line, linking all of the various contributions together into the kind of structure I indicated before.

Something new that happened in this volume, which I'd like to continue, is to go beyond simply mixing up different kinds of contribution within the volume; going beyond the form of the article itself, we 'teamed up' artists with writers, to make these coincidental interlinkages even more powerful. – like a Marvel comics 'team-up' issue.

So Thomas Ligotti's article, which is an essay in philosophical pessimism, all about the hopelessness of the human condition, our inability to get over our illusions of superiority and to accept that we are mere animals, is teamed up with a series of photographs by the Russian artist Oleg Kulik called 'Dead Monkeys',. Reading this article together with the photos makes for a really compelling experience, more than the sum of its parts. Someone wrote to me recently that they read this whilst travelling through the desert at night-time and it was really chilling!

it's important to say that all these people were perfectly unaware of each other, it's only in constructing this volume that they have been put together for the first time, again creating these new peripheral lines and connections.

Finally, Keith Tilford, an artist from Seattle, who also contributed to Collapse I, and whose drawing is on the cover of Collapse IV: a lot of Tilford's drawings are of disintegrating objects, which fits with Graham Harman's article; Graham is a philosopher who works in Cairo, another of the 'speculative realists', and who is writing, in Collapse IV, about the 'weirdness of objects'. You can see here, on the title page, we give equal billing to the writer and the artists, we try to meld them together into one new entity, one *thing*.

So once again there is this 'forced collaboration'. The aim, for me, is to follow what the work, what the contributions, suggest; and to let coincidences happen, to allow the materials themselves to dictate how the thing fits together. This can happen in many different ways – not just my forcing them together, but also, for example, in Collapse II, I received some of the contributions from philosophers, and then, when I was interviewing Roberto, the physicist, I tried to bring some of the concerns of those articles in my questions;

SLIDE: COLLAPSE VOL. V

or, in Collapse V, I sent some of the articles in the volume, together with my own thoughts on the theme, to Nigel Cooke, who then created a new set of paintings as an oblique response to them; the same in Collapse IV with Jake and Dinos Chapman.

Vol VI.

Volume six was entitled 'Geo/philosophy', and discussed the question of thought's relation to the earth in all its multiple dimensions, bringing philosophy into contact with geography, cartography, ecology, etc

Owen Hatherley on brutalism in architecture

Interview with Eyal Weizman on the architecture of the occupation

Manabrata Guha on the changing model of the earth proposed by new models of warfare

Renée Green's film 'Endless Dreams'

Artists Detanico and Lain's recoding of map data

And work by British artist Charles Avery

There is also a timely element to this question of geophilosophy: I interviewed a group of computational ecologists at Microsoft who are working on climate change models.

New: VOL VII

The next volume, which will appear in July, is on cookery.

We were talking yesterday about how Collapse would like to create a space for thought outside the pressure and the dictatorship of the urgency of the political; how it would like to be able to question premises and to escape from the obligation to immediately politicize, that is so endemic now. This volume on cookery is kind of an ultimate provocation to this Badiouist trend – to take the most domestic, inoffensive subject ...

This volume is the first in which we are including original work by an artist, a print by the british artist Jeremy Millar, which I am producing with some help fomr some friends, on a hand press, in an edition of 1000, which will be inserted into the volume.

SLIDE: GLOBAL MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

So, let's return to the model of knowledge that we were trying to overcome.

To recap: A journal might be understood as a microcosm of the university model of knowledge: as such defining a discursive space into which all contributions have to fit, a criteria which all the contents have to follow, a homogeneity and containment ensured by the institutional editorial structure.

Again, arguably, the model here is to continually reconstitute a global image of thought; to continually patch up and fill in the 'sphere of knowledge' which can be passed down to the next generation, with subdisciplines, and sub-subdisciplines, etc. to infinity. The job of each generation of academics is to fill in the gaps more, to secure the sphere of knowledge for perpetuity; and for the adventurous, to move to the edges and create interdisciplinary communications.

As I've said, I find ultra-specialisation, and the types of couterintuitive knowledge it produces, fascinating – of course I want to know about the world. But somehow I want a synthesis, an uneven but consistent synthesis, and to produce something that itself has an effect on the configuration of knowledge.

SLIDE: GLOBAL MODEL WITH FLASH

Now, to really make concepts *move* demands the discovery of, or the construction of, an *internal periphery* which disregards this global structure, or better, which unfolds it so as to experimentally refold its elements together in different ways.

It remakes the image of thought according to a new history, in which elements that previously seemed to have no connection to each other, are synthesized and connected and transform, even if in a small way, our way of thinking about the world.

So what is this model? Remember, this is really a retrospective reconstruction, that emerged from those first two positive and negative tasks, and which has now become a working model.

SLIDE: CONNECTIVE TISSUE , ADD 'OVERLAPS'

In Collapse, each contribution overlaps with at least one other, so that there is a kind of distributive structure loosely held together by these partial overlaps:

Collapse is therefore defined by nature of this series of overlaps, not (as in the traditional journal model) by a circumscription of the space. It is the overlaps that address fundamental questions in philosophy, and it is in the overlapping that those questions gain some new life, some new energy: they only come alive when they are 'between two', an intersection of at least two different, overlapping approaches.

SLIDE: TWO THINGS THAT HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH EACH OTHER

This has the interesting consequence that any two contributions taken on their own may appear to have strictly nothing to do with each other. Say, in Collapse II, an article on Islamic theology and an interview with a physicist. Or Collapse VI: a computational ecologist and medievalist scholar. Or in Collapse VII: a synaesthete, a student of postmodern warfare and weaponry. But through the maximally broad use of a theme, and a series of conceptual overlaps, a chain is built between them:

SLIDE: CONCEPTUAL CHAIN

So this is the way in which curation of each volume is a creative act - in so far as to create is to synthesise, to connect elements in a new way.

But then, It builds itself. : each volume seems somehow to build itself, and always ends up surprising me. So it seems that just by existing as a virtual entity with the capacity to make these kind of connections, Collapse attracts contributors (there has never been an open call for papers) who are not afraid of this, who are open to being 'overlapped' in some surprising way, inserted into a chain of concepts which may change the way they themselves think about their own work.

It's actually really difficult to describe, in any particular case, how this inter-linkage works. In fact, it's in the work of writing the introduction that I clarify this to myself. The introduction is a very important part of the volume, it traces the connections through all of the contents and tries to give an overview of what has been achieved conceptually. This is always retrospective, it's always a discovery of what has happened, in the process of editing.

Now, what effect does this have on the audience, and in fact, as I have realized, on *creating* a new audience, a new constituency?

SLIDE: READER'S SPHERE

Any one reader is unlikely to be familiar with all the contributors – they may recognise one or two, which will hopefully attract them to read Collapse:

but having bought the volume their eyes inevitably will wander to the other contributors, and so hopefully the reader's horizon is somehow 'stretched' by their being hooked into this chain of concepts.

SLIDE: READER STRETCHED

SLIDE: READER SPHERE / READER STRETCHED 2

And in fact this is what I find so objectionable about academic journals – you know exactly what circle the contributions are going to fall into, and such journals are read not for pleasure or to learn anything new, but out of a kind of duty to 'keep up' with all the little modifications within a given sphere of knowledge. But then the same is true of glossy magazines (whoever was surprised by Vogue?) – the two are a sort of mirror image of each other, and **somehow wanting to fulfill the promise of both** Collapse also avoids the **disappointing reality of both**

So structurally, Collapse is set up as a kind of coincidence-engineering machine.

SLIDE: + COINCIDENCE-ENGINEERING

And once again, let's return to the point about commitment and integrity:

COMMITMENT

1. Has to be a physical object – there is a 'making' involved, and this also means putting oneself on the line, taking a certain risk, and maintaining the level of risk each time by moving the operation elsewhere.
2. It is not virtual. In fact, after the print run of 1000 is sold out, it is put online for free as Pdf (but its not the same – its established as print thing. people ask for reprints)

COMMERCE

In order to make the commitment, and stay faithful to the problem, to remain independent, I have to find a way to make it viable – this still a struggle!

But I have always been interested in the entrepreneurial side of this: I am fascinated by the way that virtual entities that become real, that commitment is answered, and the way that a product takes on a life of its own

This is really a question of marketing and branding; and I am unashamedly interested in the aesthetics of Collapse, naturally, since I made it to please myself!

Distribution is almost entirely through our website, and a very few bookstores. The production is small-scale. And promotion has happened entirely autonomously, through blogs and other networks. So even if Collapse is not 'virtual', these virtual communications structures have been absolutely crucial to it, and remain so.

So, in the fight for survival, I see what I am doing as a kind of surcapitalism (after 'surrealism') – I am interested in employing those mechanisms of branding, marketing, exploitation of networks, not to produce a profit, but to produce a kind of joy in thinking.

SLIDE: + SURCAPITALISM

And people definitely do like the aesthetics, the form, the fact that it is a 'mass-produced' thing but also each edition is numbered, it has a kind of fetish value. Design carefully thought about. Unlaminated so it ages.

The success of this aspect of the project means that, although it began by being very personal, it now has a character that I feel I have to obey, so I work for it!

So you can see how, through this model of knowledge, as much as through the distributive and commercial aspects, Collapse acts as an agency that creates these new connections and 'stretches' its readers, and has produced its own audience.

SLIDE: ABREU GALLERY

One interesting way in which this has developed over recent years is not only that it has allowed Urbanomic, now, not only to be a 'real' publisher – we just published, together with Sequence Press in New York, which is based in Miguel Abreu's gallery on the lower east side, our first two monographs; but also, we have moved this experiment into other spaces, with a series of events, where we invite artists who see an engagement with philosophy as important to their work (artists must engage/be held to account)
which I will run through quickly

SLIDE: LARUELLE AND NICK LAND BOOKS

(Quickly)

SLIDE: CONCEPT HORROR SHOW

beginning with a show exhibiting the artworks included in the 'concept horror' volume.

SLIDES:

Russell Haswell

Darwin

Amanda [Sanity Assassin]

Florian

Secrets of creation

Hydroplutonic kernow

Late at tate

Medium of contingency

SLIDE: SPECULATIVE SOLUTION

Lastly, Urbanomic have been involved in a collaborative commission with Florian Hecker, which was presented at the 'Real Thing' event. I'd like to recount the history of this collaboration because I think it's a superb example of how the model that I have describes serves to activate new connections.

Florian, an electronic composer, had contacted me after having read the interview with Roberto Trotta: he said, I was so excited by this that I made a piece called 'Dark Energy'. This piece eventually was shown at Sadie Cole's in London

SLIDE: Sadie Coles Dark Energy.

Then I worked with Florian, and Russell Haswell, on a piece for Collapse 3 about their work with Xenakis's UPIC system

SLIDE: UPIC

And so recently, Florian became interested in Quentin Meillassoux's philosophical work, and Urbanomic commissioned him, with funding from the Elephant Trust, to make a piece based on Quentin's concept of 'hyperchaos', which was first performed at the Tate event, and the CD has just come out, on the Editions Mego label, with a booklet included which I edited and contributed to. So this story is a real case of production happening, across many different fields, enabled by the network of contributors of Collapse.

SLIDE: COLLAPSE VII, John Gerrard (at Tate), AO&

And from Collapse VII

John Gerrard is another artist we have been involved with, we showed his work at the Tate, and he introduced me to this very interesting collective, AO&, from Vienna, who include a very special form of cookery as part of their practice. They are included, along with John's work, in Collapse VII, and we are launching this volume as a part of their June-July residency, with Outset, in London.

I should add that, all the documentation and transcripts from these events will now be folded back into the next volume of collapse, so we could say that it has started to produce its own content through these events.

SLIDE: ALL COLLAPSES COVERS

Finally I have to say that, I began by talking about it as a fanzine – and it is still a one-man-show and a struggle! There is no funding available, and I still do everything myself... I have learned – design, typography, distribution, everything – as I went along. Collapse is a success to the extent that its sales now cover the cost of the next printing; but as for the work that goes into it, it remains a ‘labour of love’.

But I’m sure some others are in the same position; and I don’t want to end on a negative note.

Artworld : artist generous, auction.

What I would like to emphasize is that Collapse is an interesting case of how to bring together the qualities of print media; the technologies that now make it possible for one person to create a very individual, low-budget but high-quality production; and the communications that allow the building of new networks of enthusiastic and committed producers, worldwide, as well as the building of a new international audience (We even use facebook, twitter, etc...). Through an experimental usage of all of these different aspects of 21st century publishing, it is possible to start from nothing and create a publication that has a real presence and influence in the world, actually creating new connections for people working in different fields, and making new productions possible. Someone once asked me about Collapse: so do you just publish work by your friends? And I realized that in fact it’s the opposite: some of my most valued friends now are people who I have connected with through the enthusiasm and commitment I have put into Collapse, and which they share.