

Editorial Introduction

Robin Mackay

A new publication is obliged to justify its demands on the attention of a reader already besieged by countless specialist journals. This justification cannot appeal to the orgiastic logic of the filling of market 'niches'. With **COLLAPSE** we have set out to achieve quite the opposite, aiming rather at a breadth and an openness found wanting.

That academic philosophy courts overspecialisation and a certain depression of the energy of thought is news to no-one. Whilst not wishing to denigrate the necessary and exacting work of scholarship, we wished to create a publication which communicated the passion for thought, and the excitement of thinking. The work we present here is unapologetically (and not unnecessarily)

demanding: we conceived **COLLAPSE** as providing a home for conceptual work in progress, with all the rough edges this might imply.

COLLAPSE is an experimental entity, in that it has no fixed agenda, no institutional ties, no partisan position: nevertheless it will be clear that neither the Editor nor the contributors regard this experimental status as the declaration of an open season for ludic enthusiasms. But as much as we did not wish merely to collate flights of philosophical whimsy, we also sought to avoid grounding ourselves in the ‘application’ of overgeneralised theoretical tropes to specific issues in pursuit of that most dismal of goals, ‘relevance’ to the ‘contemporary’ reader.

What was clear from the start was that the way forward lay in rigorously challenging philosophical thought by confronting it with conceptual production from elsewhere (and not in a presumptuous relation of ‘application’): there is no doubt that philosophy only stays alive by maintaining porous boundaries with its outside—this does not detract at all from its specificity and value as a discipline.

If part of the problem with philosophy today lies in its professionalisation, we hope not to offend any of the contributors to this volume by saying that we consider every one of them to be *amateurs* in the true sense: dedicated and enthusiastic lovers of abstract thought, each engaged in adventures of ideas, each refusing to contain these adventures within strict formal or

disciplinary boundaries. It should go without saying that, even if the two are rarely found in pure form, we favour *de jure* mad scientists with their bubbling conceptual cauldrons over career academics with their meticulously cautious conference papers.

Finally, we envisage each volume of **COLLAPSE** as the intersection, in a multi-dimensional space, of diverse lines of thought; the optimum circumstance would be if each reader picked up **COLLAPSE** on the strength of only one of the articles therein, the others being involuntarily absorbed as a kind of side-effect that would propagate the eccentric conjuncture by stealth, and spawn yet others.

A note on form: in several of the articles collected in **COLLAPSE I** we have used the interview form, and hope to do so in future. At its best it offers a medium in which the play of concepts takes a natural course and order of exposition, allowing the reader in turn to be swept up by its movement, and to reconstruct its underlying consistency at their leisure and with their own resources. Such an interview should read lightly whilst its spontaneous discursive complexity will be conducive to repeated readings.

Although we decided early on that eclecticism was neither to be scorned nor feared, a theme emerged, unbidden, during the long process of clarifying the journal’s aims and collecting and commissioning work for this first volume. The working title was thus ‘numerical

materialism’: an inquiry into the extent and nature of number’s dominion over any philosophy calling itself a materialism; but also an inquiry into the materiality of number and numerical practices. Such a theme describes a realm exemplary in its liminal nature, not only connecting mathematics and philosophy but abutting onto every theoretical discourse with any aspiration to formal rationality.

We are privileged to have amongst our contributors ALAIN BADIOU, widely recognised as one of the most important philosophers alive today, and one who has consistently pursued this line of thought, often against the grain of philosophical orthodoxy. In our interview with Badiou we seek to clarify the consequences of a materialist thought which defines ‘nature’ through mathematics, determining ‘history’ in terms of its problematic ‘outside’. We also succeed in provoking Badiou into addressing in detail some of the major objections raised against his doctrine, and into elaborating more precisely how he sees mathematics in its relation to other sciences. He also speaks of the new conceptual resources which his latest book *Logiques des mondes* brings to his ongoing work.

Although we have made clear our aspiration for the volume as a whole, this opening interview, together with the contributions of GREGORY CHAITIN and MATTHEW WATKINS particularly demonstrate the sort of conjunction we hope to effect with COLLAPSE: it would be difficult to find any other publication in which these

could be found together. Here are three thinkers whose differences are not limited to their theoretical decisions but extend to their styles, and their respective conceptions of the nature of their subject. Despite this divergence, a number of common threads means that reading them together produces a combination that is more than the sum of its—already considerable—parts.

To say that GREGORY CHAITIN is well-known in his field would be to tell only half the truth: in fact Chaitin has for many years been something of a gleeful maverick. Whilst there can be no doubt as to his credentials as a ‘serious mathematician’ Chaitin not only enjoys communicating his mathematical discoveries to a wide an audience as possible, but he also never fails to draw from them (sometimes to the chagrin of fellow mathematicians) the most general speculative conclusions—just as did Leibniz, the very figure invoked in Chaitin’s whirlwind review of ‘Epistemology as Information Theory’.

Our interview with MATTHEW WATKINS is the very portrait of a thinker who defies categorisation. Watkins’s singular talent at explaining complex concepts and his fluid, resolutely non-specialist speculative exploration of their significance makes of this interview a kind of conceptual cinematography, and made conducting it a genuine pleasure. As the engineer of a virtual agency which collects and catalyses material in an area of research which has only recently begun to condense, Watkins exemplifies well what was intended by the provocative subtitling of COLLAPSE as a ‘Journal

of Philosophical Research and Development': thought no longer takes place in the head—if it ever did—but involves the development of distributions and connections, a bio-techno-cognitive rhizome. Watkins also fiercely advocates the virtues of a marginal position which allows him the maximum space for reflection; as well as his substantive work we discuss the experiences formative of this conviction.

Badiou raises the question of the experiment: scientists continually set parameters and contexts for their experiments. Chaitin argues—and Watkins observations seem to support the thesis—that mathematics may also be, or may become, an experimental discipline. In NICK LAND's contribution, the meta-rational orthodoxies of experimental practice are themselves put to the test. Can the interrogation by an exotericised qabbalistics of the lexicographical element in which we are inscribed be denied the status of a science on the basis of utilitarian criteria? A delirious alphanumeric arithmetic...

The liberal media, with its indefatigable good intentions, has continually sought wholly to separate the ideology of terrorism from the tenets of a (poorly-defined) 'true' Islam. Whilst leaving no doubt as to the contingency of the circumstances, in his article for **COLLAPSE I** REZA NEGARASTANI describes the mutation, hybridisation and militarization of certain components of Islamic thought. The mongrel nature of this terrible conceptual assemblage makes it all the more remarkable that Negarastani ultimately refers it to a mathematical

model; a veritable *mathesis* of fear.

The psychoanalyst and philosopher Lacan famously described his project as being that of a 'mathematisation of the unconscious'—a research programme that ended, if not in madness, certainly in an obscurity which endures to this day. In his 'Mathematics of Intensity' THOMAS DUZER picks up some of the threads of this project, inflecting it with an affirmative stance which militates against much of the psychoanalytical inheritance.

NICK BOSTROM heads an intriguing new research initiative where philosophical thought is put to work on issues formerly the quarry of inconsequential media panics and politicians platitudes; issues of truly unimaginable magnitude. Whilst such initiatives are no doubt to be applauded, we were interested to explore in our interview with Bostrom not only the work of his *Future of Humanity Institute* but also to ask whether philosophical thought must make compromises in order to break its traditional academic bonds.

KEITH TILFORD's graphical work draws on philosophical debates in poststructuralism: his 'crowd' drawings evoking especially the ongoing debates over the nature of multiplicity and individuation. 'INCOGNITUM' not only relates some intriguing details of numerical-cultural archaology, but has also compiled for us a selection of source materials in the shape of ABJAD diagrams. It was always our intention that **COLLAPSE** should not be purely textual, which makes these last two

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contributions are especially welcome.

It remains only to thank the contributors for their work and their patience during the assembling of this volume; and the reader for supporting this new venture.

In relating so expansively our aspirations for **COLLAPSE**, we do not dare to hope, nor do we mean to claim, that this first volume fulfills them all. At least the experiment is now underway; the Editor welcomes your responses and contributions for future volumes.

Robin Mackay,
Oxford, August 2006.