Sound and Concept

In an extended mix of their conversation with <u>Electronic Beats</u> magazine, electronic music producer and DJ Lee Gamble talks sound, thought, abstraction, and jungle with Urbanomic director Robin Mackay

ELECTRONIC BEATS: For those unaware of your work, does Urbanomic have something of an MO through which to get a grasp of what you do?

RM: In 2006 I started publishing the journal *Collapse*. The idea was to try and bring together people from different disciplines and practices to create a dialogue on philosophical questions that wouldn't be limited by those constraints. No matter what they're doing in life, everyone eventually comes up against problems and questions that can be called 'philosophical'. Any practice whatsoever has some kind of conceptual underpinning that sometimes breaks down or needs to be challenged, and those are moments of creativity, I think.

This extended into various projects, other books, events, and artist commissions, and those events then feed back into the publishing, generating new content and drawing in new collaborators. A distributed productive microculture is the term that probably encapsulates my highest aspirations for it.

Everything that comes out of the work gets stirred back into it and produces something else. A distributed productive microculture

EB: are you cognizant of the constellation of artists that orbit your publishing house? What's the nature of the relationship, assuming there is one?

RM: For sound work in particular, one of our major ongoing collaborations has been with Florian Hecker, who I first met when he and Russell Haswell put out the *Blackest Ever Black* album in 2007, and the three of us collaborated on a piece in *Collapse* III, and that really spurred my interest in experimental electronic music and its histories. I think Russell knew about Urbanomic's work and about stuff I had done previously, and for both of them there is a strong conceptual component to what they do. Later, Russell did an event with us, and Florian came to Falmouth and did a discussion and a gig in our studio which was really intense.

Then we commissioned a piece, *Speculative Solution*, for an event we did at Tate Britain, that was eventually released as a CD. That was precisely a case of thinking about how this 'relay' works—there was a self-consciousness as we developed that piece about the process itself, the question of how this relationship between abstract concepts and a sensory dramatisation might work, and how the concepts themselves get transformed in the process.[1]

I've come into contact with numerous electronic music producers who seem to have an affinity with what we're doing and appreciate how Urbanomic presents the bleeding edge of philosophy. Although some of it can be a bit dense and forbidding, that's probably something that appeals to them, as they

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1. See 'Speculative Solution: Quentin Meillassoux and Florian Hecker Talk Hyperchaos', <http://www.urbanomic.com/document/speculative-solution-meillassoux-hecker/>.

are excited rather than scared off by density and complexity. It's natural that artists who are interested in pushing boundaries in terms of sound and music are also going to be interested in conceptual work that isn't afraid to experiment.

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For me the link between synthetic sound and philosophical thinking has always been self-evident—it's about getting under the surface, and abstraction. All of the work we publish is about challenging inherited conceptions of what it means to be a human, what it means to sense, to understand, or to think. This means expanding your perception of the world through concepts, using philosophical thinking to break down what's known and familiar until you realise that underneath those recognisable ordinary surfaces there's a whole world of intricate abstract mechanisms working away. Isn't that really the same as what happens when you begin to understand how to synthesize sounds, and on a sensory level when you're making tracks, when you've spent 7 hours listening to the same samples over and over and shifting things millisecond by millisecond; or when you've been dancing all night and the music has got right inside you? You get a totally different sense of time, you hear things differently, you tune in to things on an unfamiliar level. So both of these processes are getting to similar places through different means. I think they have a lot to offer each other.

EB: where do you think the attraction lies for producers/musicians in particular?

RM: There's a very particular dynamic that has characterised the history of electronic dance music. Engineers have conceptualised music or sound in a systematic way, because in order to build a machine, you have to structure things, you have to decide how to organise the materials for processing. But then you'll have an experimental process where people are using the tools, exploring the space they open up, testing the boundaries of what can be done, and

'misusing' the technology: the most famous example being the 303, an engineer's best effort to make a machine that could substitute for the bassist in a pub-rock band! That loop of analysis and synthesis is important, and probably philosophy needs to learn more about the synthetic phase—the most interesting philosophers are those who are synthesizers. I find these moments some of the most thrilling revelations in respect to how human creativity works, when systematization, experimentation, and intense somatic experience feed off each other and make something new possible. Take for instance the way that jungle used timestretching—instead of using it for 'correcting' things subtly, it totally canes it to create a sense of an impossible, attenuated time, a new sensation. Who can ever forget hearing 'Terminator' for the first time? As far as the relationship between pitch and duration is concerned—one of the most fundamental parameters of recorded sound—it's like Rufige actually broke time itself, revealing an underside where uncanny effects seep out...

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So electronic music has continually drawn out the 'surplus value' latent in these machines. Not as an analytic exercise, but in order to provoke new sensory experiences. I think at their best those sensations are something like signposts for those who are inclined to follow them: vectors that point toward future concepts.

As well as the inherent affinity between music and philosophy, I feel like Urbanomic as a publisher and a label such as Mego, PAN, etc. have a lot in common. We sell books all over the world and they get mentioned here there and everywhere; but concretely, it's bascially still just me at home doing everything, from editing to typesetting to collecting orders off the website, and so on. I think the same probably goes for the smaller, more experimental labels: it's one person, and probably their partner being forced into helping them out.

The other side of that is that there's a really beautiful process where, if you have integrity and pay careful attention to how the thing is growing, how it presents itself, what it connects to, and if you make only the right compromises (because you've got to make some), then it becomes much bigger than you as a person, the brand becomes something real, has a certain independence from you, and in effect tells you what you can and can't do with it. That's been my aim: to make it into something that's really bulletproof in terms of its independence and integrity, and to retain its identity, even if it shifts slightly with every new release. Of course it's tough and you have to try and balance that with not being too much of a control freak and letting go a bit. Steve Goodman [Kode9] talks about how that happened with Hyperdub too, at a certain point all the admin and trying to juggle things threatened to eclipse any possibility of actually making his own material and being excited with what he was doing. Then you have to shift things and move into a new phase. It's tough to keep things on track.

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Also, a 'label' grows along with its audience, who identify not just with a particular artist but with the label as such; and a network of collaborators who recur in different combinations across different projects. And I hope there's a sense of excitement: we're not publishing loads of stuff in all sorts of subject areas—all the releases are connected and each one matters; it's like white labels: new stuff that's just been made, that's relatively unpolished, a bit 'out there'. Every time adding something that changes the game, adds a new element, twists things.

Finally there's the obvious fact that you have to be a bit unbalanced and obsessive to do this. You don't make any real money from it, and there are moments when you wonder why you're doing it, but then a new project comes along that feels like it just has to be done, someone's work that you feel really deserves to be out there—and you get sucked back in again!

Lee, you're about to start up your own label… why's that something you want to do, and what's your vision for it?

LG: To be honest, it just feels like a good time to do it. I am able to commit time to it now and there is an infrastructure there for me. I'm interested in UIQ working as a kind of curatorial base for me as much as anything, for now It's starting as a label, I'm releasing some 12"s, but it could morph into anything. I am working with a couple of people, one on web design, coding and digital stuff and one on design. We are building our own radio antenna at the moment, which we'll be able to stream live. I'll be able to stream the signal from my house in North London to, lets say a live show I'm doing somewhere else on the planet, in real time. The UIQ signal will work with the VLF frequency band. I like the idea of grabbing these atmospheric signals from the atmosphere and decoding them from my house and rerouting them somewhere into a space via the internet based part of UIQ. These waves travel in a zig-zag shape bouncing off the Earth's surface, then off the bottom of the ionosphere. I love radio for many reasons, and I'll be working with it with UIQ in one form or another. I invited the philosopher Thomas Metzinger, director of the Theoretical Philosophy Group and the Neuroethics Research Unit at University of Mainz, Germany to come and talk on NTS Radio—this was a 'UIQ Radio Session', so, there will hopefully be more stuff like this too..

There have been two 12"s released so far—one by the Riga based artist N1L and one by the Egyptian musician, ZULI. The label's sound will reveal itself as it develops, but it feels pretty open to me. I want to be able to use UIQ to present work in many ways as it grows. This could really mean anything. I'm releasing a series of 12"s on a kind of sub-label of UIQ called 'UIQ Inversions'—the first one will be out real soon...

RM: And how has your work evolved over the years since you first got into making music?

LG: I'd only really thought about this in the last few years when I had done a couple of interviews and was kind of forced to think back to when I started making stuff. My first real memory of being creative with sound and engaging with it on the level

of me doing something with it as opposed to simply receiving it as a listener was when I was around 10/11. I had a little 'midi-hifi' as they were called (not sure what the 'midi' stands for?!) by a company called Alba, it was red. It had a 'tape 2 tape' function and you could put one deck into record and switch from the other settings, 'tape', 'radio', 'record player' and it would record whichever one you were switched to.

RM: I had one too!!

LG: So, I made these cassette recordings, which would jump from a record, to what was on the other tape to the random bits from the radio. I really had no idea why I was doing this but they were a type of collage I guess, I thought it was funny. I made quite a few of these tapes.

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So thinking back it seems a fairly natural approach to sound for me was to experiment with it, to clash it, use it as source and have some control on it. I obviously had no idea what Musique Concrete was then, what tape collage was, what collage was at all! I don't remember having access to musical instruments though—maybe if I had, I would have interacted with sound differently.

Radio appears to be an important thing for me too. From these primary collages using radio, to re-cording quite a bit off radio in my teens, to dj'ing on radio in my teens, to curating and producing several radio series' for Resonance 104.4FM in the early 2000s when I moved to London. I made a work in 2006 called 'ssmix4 voxel version'—which was a computer music composition made specifically for radio which explored recording and processing and imitating types of radio transmissions related to the cosmos, ideas of space travel, acceleration, weightlessness to *Diversions* (initially conceived as a radio work), to my current monthly show on NTS which is back to me turning up with records and mixing them!

I was reading an interview with Luc Ferrari recently and he talks about how he moved on and developed ideas but never ditched old themes or interests but dragged them with him, and I feel this strongly too. *Dutch Tvashar Plumes*, and to a lesser extent *KOCH* both use many sounds I developed when I was working with 'computer music'. Ideas and sounds I had designed years earlier without the intention to make *Tvashar*. Just recontextualised for another aspect of my interests. I very much like this idea of embedding ghosts into sound.

I made a lot of material between 2000–2010 in my clumsy explorations of 'computer music'. But only released a relatively small amount of it. In hindsight it was like building a personal sound bank of pretty unique sounds for myself, which was a great way to learn how to make and design sound too. During this period I didn't work with samples at all, just data. I'd re-sample myself. It's a very sculptural, almost bacterial way of working. Manipulation, improvisation, deconstruction, reconstruction, synthesis, DSP as the tools for the composition, creation and design.

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It really forced me into looking into many types of digital synthesis and signal processing techniques, psychoacoustics, noise, silence, the particle and sub-particle aspects of audio. This sat alongside my reading of similar (non-musical) subjects at the time and some more geeky bibles like *The Computer Music Tutorial* by Curtis Roads. I played live sets a fair bit during this time. Sometimes on dispersion (multichannel) systems, sometimes in the basement of a pub at a noise gig, sometimes in improvised music settings. My approach to my live sound was really chaotic, I'd use a Max/MSP and or SuperCollider patch and really just hit go, loading sound files at random allowing the software(s) to chew them up whilst trying to sculpt the whole thing in realtime. Composition as process. As you can imagine, sometimes it worked, sometimes not, but that's how it was.

I still go back and work on my old computers using these old codes and synthesis methods from time to time. It's just that now my approach to composition is different—my goal is different. I got really fucking bored of making a total racket at people to be honest, towards the end of this period, my live sets became more and more intense, really apocalyptic sounding and it just felt dead and reactionary and sensationalist and one-dimensional and not experimental at all.

There seems to be a strange interpretation of the term 'experimental'. People seem to use it to almost refer to a 'genre'

Now, people might say my music is less experimental, but for me this isn't true. I feel I can explore many more interests now. I've had to learn how to make music that works in a totally different way than I knew how to. There seems to be a strange interpretation of the term 'experimental'. In recent years I notice people seem to use it to almost refer to a 'genre' rather than something descriptive of the music itself.

EB: perhaps the premise of this question is reductive, but Robin, do you see a link between some of the tenets of what you publish and the aesthetic and/or conceptual bent of an artist like Lee's music?

RM: Isn't it a bad idea to divide music into some that is conceptual/experimental and some that isn't? 'Conceptual' music that is just made so as to demonstrate some concept or other isn't gonna be good. And conversely, there is a lot of great pop music that is sophisticated, innovative and complex. Pop music has to continually innovate and open up new kinds of sensation. I got absolutely obsessed with producers like Max Martin, and Dr Luke's work on Britney Spears and the early Ke$ha songs.[2]

He's creating some extraordinary abstractions, we instinctively recognise it as 'a girl singing and some keyboards and drums' but the mecha-sonics of it are crazily complex. It's like there's this sealed, polished artificial skin that makes it seem like a simple package, but at the microscale, its construction is incredibly dense and tweaked in every possible way.

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Producers have concepts even if they aren't concepts that you would, or could, write down as verbal propositions. Concept really just means to think things together (*con-cept*), to group things together in a certain configuration that is consistent and that gels in a compelling way; to create a concept is to take a new slice through reality. Sometimes the concept comes first and then you make use of it in the work; but I think that artists often have a vague perception of what they are interested in, and have the sensitivity and skill to stay focused and follow that perception through and put the thing together, and it's only afterwards that you can then extract the concept into language, give it a name, which already changes it; and maybe see how if fits with other ideas that are floating around. You experience something, and you know it affects the way you organise reality, it takes some work for your brain to adjust, and only afterwards can you try to explain it to yourself and think about it 'conceptually' as such.

Lee, this may not be the case, but I'm really interested if there are some concepts that have just emerged as you work on stuff…are there like categories of sound, or certain procedures, that you use, and do you have private names for them?

LG: Definitely, that is what happens in a way. I really like this aspect of making an album, where the process of making it somehow becomes the thing itself. My approach is categorized but not in any particular order or anything, more in terms of the very separate stages in making a record, and as these stages become clearer some procedures get less attention than others, and the concept, the work, begins to reveal itself. So, at some point I'll find myself in a

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2. This conversation took place before we heard news of Ke$ha's lawsuit against Dr Luke, which reveals a sordid human dimension to the relationship of singer to producer-as-manipulator, especially given that Sony apparently deem the integrity of the product Ke$ha to be of more value than the well-being of the singer herself. Without intending to imply that this changes nothing (hence the note) I decided to leave the text of the conversation as it was—RM.

position where I have a fairly formalized idea that has sort of appeared. I guess that's the emergent aspect of this approach.

I like to map music out as kind of visual scores. I did this for most of the computer music I released with Entr'acte, and many tracks on the PAN releases too. It's at this compositional stage where I more consciously start to make definite shapes which have been informed directly by those prior conceptual stages but it's at this point they start to reflect these ideas in more real forms. For me this approach is loose and flexible, and I like that.

It really is for me a matter of colliding things, eliminating, adding over time. Working out some kind of language I want it to speak, its syntax, its history, its futurisms, its artwork

I haven't made an album in that way that you go to a studio and 'make an album'—it really is for me a matter of colliding things, eliminating, adding over time. Working out some kind of language I want it to speak, its syntax, its history, its futurisms, its artwork. I make tracks then leave them for some time. Something strange happens to them over time. I can listen more objectively when I've forgotten about certain technical aspects of how something was made. All these procedures have to align and sit together for me to consider it a work.

I'm really conscious not to let 'concept' swamp the music if it doesn't need to be a visible part of the work. *Diversions 1994-1996* for instance is simply built on a ton of emotional shit. The idea to sample my cassettes from the time was really a basic system, a compositional approach. That initial premise alongside not allowing myself to use any other sound source, and also to use very little technical means to make it were really important. Basically, keeping my technical tools to a minimum related to the '3 second' sample memory times of that era. I really wanted to try and work with those similar parameters that seemed such a limitation at the time.

As I got involved in the sampling, and collation stages (structural)—representing these emotions from a very particular time in my life became really key

and impossible to swerve. Things like 'compositional time' and how to allow the feeling of time passing slowly, became important to do this—attempting to slow it down to the point that you allow people to move into a previously smaller space and drift within it's extension. These aspects that emerged during the making of it overtook the 'I'm sampling old jungle tapes' (concept) aspect in some ways. I think it's interesting to encourage a structural methodology to expose more cerebral or emotional things, things that may be embedded within them, stuff that is superfluous to the rules that can't be 'scored' or written down. I would never have approached *Diversions* with the idea of 'representing emotions' or anything naff like that!! but you know, this basic, rule centered, formalistic approach ends up exposing aspects I hadn't written into the code.

A controlled mutation, not introducing too many new elements but just working and reworking and shifting the coordinates

RM: Music can really stretch your perceptions. I remember how amazing it was to hear footwork for the first time: it was the first thing I'd heard since jungle where, on a first listen, it just didn't make sense at all, it actually hurt my brain; and then within a couple of days it's just totally reprogrammed you and you're totally into it. That's what I loved about some of the more abstract drum and bass, I would genuinely have these moments of total wonder where I couldn't comprehend what I was hearing. Some of the Penny Black 12s, and the tracks on the Razor's Edge label, still sound magnificent, the way in which they kept on working the sounds and the techniques more densely—stretching and folding it to more and more complex levels—you know there's this thing in mathematics called the baker's transformation which is about stretching and folding a unit square into an infinitely chaotic volume. What's especially delicious about the Razor's Edge tracks is the fact a lot of them still use that classic Rob Playford Metalheadz soundbank, just like 10 sounds used over and over again but morphing every time. And the rhythm is almost disintegrating but just holding together here. A controlled mutation, not introducing too many new elements but just working and reworking and shifting the coordinates.

That was totally a productive microculture!

I remember a lot of the time with drum and bass I used to have the hallucinatory impression that the sounds were speaking some kind of language to me that I couldn't quite catch. It was mostly instrumental of course, but if anything could be said to 'talk' in jungle it was the drums, the way they communicated some hybrid of human gesture and machine function. The more abstract it got, the more alien information was being implanted in me…and then every so often someone will open up a new branch of the evolutionary tree. I remember being at a night in Coventry in 1996 and hearing Doc Scott's *Shadow Boxing* for the first time, it was like someone had rotated the whole form into something new, screwed down the lid on the amen breaks and made them into potential energy—and flipped the assault of jungle into this amazing frequency-separated military march, with that unidentifiable cello-foghorn-buzzsaw blasting implacably through some kind of granular fog, speaking to you from far away, beaming some kind of desolate, threatening message right into your chest and down through your belly over and over again…. One funny thing: I always imagined that *Shadow Boxing* was the fruit of a really long intensive labour perfectly separating out the frequencies and making everything precise, I tweeted something about it and Doc Scott just said no, it was an accident!

Unfortunately—and this is just another part of this whole process—for me that was also the moment when drum & bass started going down a very unfortunate road, getting more metronomic and repressed, and it never came out the other side. The same thing happened with dubstep, I think—there are these attractors for musical forms which, when they get too locked in, drain off the will to abstraction and experimentation. You can hear it in the 2011 *Shadow Boxing* remix—everything got solidified into rigid aggression, bmm-kk, bm-kk. In the tracks of that time, even the moments of amen release don't even seem to hit you anymore. That's quite a line to walk, screwing it all down, but retaining the virtually-present fullness of rhythm instead of total reduction.

Lee, are there any specific tracks you can remember that totally flipped you out like that…?

LG: Sure, in relation to Jungle, there are quite a few from that period to be honest. You've picked many of them here already. Interesting that you pick up on that 'Rob Playford sound' thing, definitely with you on that, and it's totally encompassed in that Razors Edge series, but also a lot of the labels (and producers) of that period had a sound or set of sounds you could say. I think of early Ibiza Records, Certificate 18, Reinforced, Photek, Tom & Jerry, the Bristol axis with V Records (especially the drums), Blame & Justice's 'ICONS', Legend Records, Basement, Ganja. Maybe this was initially something practical in relation to the access to samples? But also relates to our conversation about 'surplus value'. In this case what's within a sound bank, the re-sampling aspect, morphing and re-using more minimal means, (the amen break itself could be perhaps the most extreme example of this?)

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It happened with Techno, hip-hop etc too, (I'm thinking of Robert Hood extracting so much from a pretty small palette of sounds) But, for me, Jungle seemed to accelerate this approach like nothing else and just chewed stuff up until it disintegrated over only a few short years. In a way, some of those sounds are therefore glued to a specific period of time.

Sonically, it will always align itself with the radio for me. Some Tom & Jerry 12"s sound like the radio, the samples within them sound like the radio, and they overall sound like the radio. Some collage of stuff that's out there, future news, history, disembodied voices, clashed together. Future-past re-portage of some kind.

I remember hearing Steve Goodman, I think, also talking about this 're-programming'—After I stopped my involvement with Jungle/Drum & Bass (putting my records and tapes into storage and started trying to look at other forms of composition.) I distinctly remember not being able to lose this inherited programming. I remember it really pissing me off at the

time as I was trying to look at other ways of moving sound over time. But i honestly don't think it has or will ever leave my DNA.

RM: *Diversions 1994–1996* really took me back, in a kind of dreamlike way, to the early years of jungle. It's startling because what you're using are sonic environments, the expansive sonic landscapes that introduce drum and bass tracks and which usually you wouldn't even hear when a DJ's playing, because you'd rarely get a track played from the very beginning. It's like you took these spaces inside which all the 'action' happens and brought them into the foreground, and the tracks are arranged so as to isolate and examine them in a very concentrated way. So it's almost as if you can hear reflective thinking happening; it's quite an achievement, sound arranged in such a way that it seems to begin to think about itself, a fragment of a track reflecting on the history of its genre.

What's really exciting for me is when you can't listen to something without this other thought process also coming in: What exactly is it that I'm hearing?

I think a similar thing happens in a lot of the 'experimental' stuff I'm into (e.g. Yasunao Tone, Russell Haswell, Mark Fell, Florian Hecker, Whitehouse, Rashad Becker), but also in material that's more 'musical'. What's really exciting for me is when you can't listen to something without this other thought process also coming in: What exactly is it that I'm hearing? Why am I choosing to listen to this? What relation does this have to other musical and non-musical sounds? Is this 'music', and if not, what is it...? Triggering those thought process isn't about somehow draining the sensory experience and making it intellectual; on the contrary, it intensifies its effects further.

Again I'd come back to saying that it's not something that only happens with 'experimental' music. AG Cook (PC Music) is an great example.

You could just listen to it as pop music, and some people—I find this weird—seem to regard it as pastiche; but it's obviously doing something new. When you try to work out what edges it's pushing at, what elements the production is intensifying or fragmenting, it becomes really interesting. These tracks maintain an astonishing level of sonic bounce, energy, brightness and overcompression, and an overt synthetic feel, but there's also a cheap guerilla aspect to it that I like—Happy Shopper accelerationism. There's something specifically British about what you can hear in there. There's a meticulous handling of precision and saturation and colour in every element, heightening them to the extreme through contrast, separation, and compression. Then that's mixed with quite sentimental melodic lines that could have come out of Stock, Aitken and Waterman, but they're pulled apart and made staccato and punctuated so that your brain has to do more work to piece the tune together. In the QT project there's a drift toward synaesthesia, where a totally artificial 'artist' is expanded into a speculative hypermedia product (maybe the drink's real, I'm not sure...).

It was a revelation when I heard Cook talking about his obsession with Conlon Nancarrow. I thought, yes, of course...! Because what Nancarrow's experiments really do is to intensify a musical affect that belongs to a whole lineage of mechanised popular music. Even today if you look at a music sequencing application you can see the continuity with the rolls of paper used to 'program' a pianola, and moreover you can *hear* that historical continuity—just listen to a fairground organ and some happy hardcore back-to-back! And PC Music extends this tendency where the nature of the recording/programming medium, and the stringency of its mechanised temporality, is allowed to assert itself and to become a part of the message, demanding new modes of listening and creating new possibilities for unknown pleasures.

On the level of sound alone I find myself trying to conceptualise what it is that I'm hearing and 'what is it that makes today's pop so different, so appealing'.... As with the 303, or timestretching, it's often to do with intensifying or tweaking something into a state that you'd think was totally too much, or just plain comical (like when grime producers started using those cheap plasticky Playstation sounds), but then managing to integrate it, fold it back into the framework of a genre. Often I find the producers who manage to operate that reintegration more interesting than someone doing weird shit for people

who want weird shit. I see all of this in relation to what Mark Fisher, brilliantly I think, has called 'pulp modernism', designating a whole range of cultural phenomena in which formal violence is experimented with, enacted, and enjoyed within popular forms. I believe AG Cook and Danny L. Harle who do PC Music are graduates in music composition, so that clashing of high and low is very much a conscious thing.

EB: Lee, what was it about Urbanomic that drew you to their releases? How did you first get in touch with it?

There was some shadowy group of people based at Warwick University who were writing about Metalheadz, Georges Bataille, Science Fiction, Afro-Futurism, Gilles Deleuze—all these things spoken about in the same breath, which seemed unusual

LG: I don't remember exactly, more than likely though it would have been from looking into the webpages of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit/CCRU— what appealed to me about them/it was that there was some shadowy group of people based at Warwick University who were writing about Metalheadz, Georges Bataille, Science Fiction, Afro-Futurism, Gilles Deleuze—all these things spoken about in the same breath, which seemed unusual. There was also a link to Birmingham/West Midlands, which is where I'm from....

RM: The CCRU was the product of a small group at Warwick University during the mid-nineties studying with the philosopher Nick Land (probably one of the last really original philosophers to be able to survive inside a British university)—at the same period when jungle/drum and bass was really going abstract. It was a kind of unofficial renegade group, and that was where I started doing publications, there was a photocopied fanzine ***Collapse that was the precursor to *Collapse*, and then a series of pamphlets called *Abstract Culture*.[3]

CCRU would do conferences and instead of just reading a paper, read out these kind of blunted, cut-up texts over some dark drum and bass mix.... With CCRU this was always a major thing, and is something that's carried on in Urbanomic: it is these cultural encounters that fuel thinking and confront it with moments that make something shift inside thought. So, we'd talk about this kind of thing constantly—drum and bass, cyberpunk fiction, SF movies, the early days of the Internet, all of that was precisely what we called 'abstract culture'. I had a whole philosophical deduction about the transcendental significance of timestretching! Kodwo Eshun once talked about CCRU as 'putting theory on the other deck'—blending the conceptual with the insights that come from your mind and body being totally absorbed into these abstract environments. Steve [Kode9] was a 'member' of CCRU, I DJ'd with him a few times at the Students Union at Warwick, and we were both making our first tracks at the time. It's a bit of a hollow boast now, but I taught Steve how to use Cubase—it turned out he was a bit more dedicated than me at that, I guess, my tunes were pretty poor! It's interesting that, after we republished Nick Land's work in *Fanged Noumena*, and now with *#Accelerate* containing some of the CCRU texts, there's a revival of interest in that work—and the people involved in CCRU have also started to get back in contact and think about it again. Steve just released the Audint *Martial Hauntology* box set, which is in some ways a return to the CCRU vibe, combining sonic fictions, speculative thinking, quasi-historical narratives, and concepts (what CCRU called 'hyperstition')—as did Mark Fisher and Justin Barton (also both ex-Warwick) in their recent *On Vanishing Land*.[4] There's a lot of potential there, a whole way of working. It's as if CCRU happened too early and had to disappear for two decades....

LG: I was also looking into the work of Mark Fisher and Nick Land alongside several blogs at the time, which seemed to be in the same vein of thought (some of which I would eventually find in the pages of *Collapse*) around 2008/9-ish. I noticed Urbanomic arranging events for Russell Haswell's *Recorded While It Actually Happened* and Florian Hecker's *Speculative Solution* shortly after. Both artists I had

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3. <http://virtualfutures.co.uk/archive/ccru/> (Simon Reynolds on CCRU).

4. See 'On Vanishing Land' and 'Outsights' in *When Site Lost the Plot* (Urbanomic, 2015).

been listening to for some time already. So that was another connection. Later on, I realized there were also links to Steve Kode9 and others....

We set up the studio with seating around the outside, totally in the dark, with a spotlit plinth in the centre over which we draped a dead pheasant

RM: Yeah, we put on a performance of Russell's piece at our studio space in Falmouth: We set up the studio with seating around the outside, totally in the dark, with a spotlit plinth in the centre over which we draped a dead pheasant we'd got from a gamekeeper from a local country estate, and covered with plastic flies. Then we played the whole piece (around 20 minutes) and also a recorded interview with Russell, it was a top night!

LG: I started reading *Collapse* around this time (2008/9). It had a speculative nature to it and seemed to delve into aspects of modern/future culture, science and philosophy in a way that I hadn't found in other publications I could buy at the time. Topics like neurology, computer music, language, cooking, speculative philosophy, cybernetics, club music, futurology, sci-fi, virology, bacteria, futurism, decay, noise—collapse compiled many of them into single journal issues under overall headings like 'Concept Horror' or ' Geo/Philosophy' or 'Culinary Materialism' or 'Numerical Materialism'...

Obviously, more specific pieces within each journal caught my intrigue—like Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart's 'Alien Science', Nick Land's *Fanged Noumena*', Reza Negarestani's 'Undercover Softness, Architecture and Politics of Decay'.

Collapse still confuses the hell out of me quite a bit, which I don't mind. There are points when I'm not sure what I am reading isn't just fabrication, and that's interesting too. But I really like the way the publication links things together, sort of forcing you to think about them from within a banner. They may then not appear quite as they seem, and offer me a new insight into a particular topic. Whether that's the intention or whether I'm misunderstanding, I don't know. It's not important. Certain things fire my brain in certain directions. I don't expect to

completely understand all these things (all of anything for that matter), but that doesn't stop them potentially infecting me as an artist.

Certain things fire my brain in certain directions. I don't expect to completely understand all these things, but that doesn't stop them potentially infecting me as an artist

I remember reading *Fanged Noumena* on holiday, every day for about ten days I would wake up really early, make coffee and read it — it became intriguing to frame my day this way. I became a little lost in it, certainly—but in part the confusion led me to writing a lot during those ten days. Some of that 'research' (I guess you could call it) became very important for me to start sculpting the ideas together for *Dutch Tvashar Plumes*—there was this out-of-body-like aspect to reading it daily like that, that I aligned with other stuff I was reading on types of memory and where and how it was stored and re-accessed. A large framework for that record, the reason to collate it and present it in a certain way came from my reading into 'hallucination and release hallucinations' and how the brain, when starved of stimulation it has become accustomed to can start introducing 'musical memories'. There was nothing specific in Land's writing about this particular subject, just that in those ten days of reading that kind of material and allowing yourself to be in that kind of head space felt like a jump off point for me to explore and start working on an idea.

RM: This theme of hallucination is really important I think. I've been translating Éric Alliez's book *The Brain-Eye*, which is a heavy-duty tome about the history of modern painting, and the way in which painters broke free from the dogmatic expectations that painting had to represent 'nature' in a certain way, and began to see their fundamental material—colour—as a way to heighten perception, to understand 'natural' vision, and to go beyond it: ultimately all vision is seen to be a hallucination, and the artist should explore the expanded range of that hallucination rather than reining it back in and reproducing 'reality'. I've applied that approach to sound in a few things I've written about Hecker's work, it would apply just as much to Lee, or to AG Cook's productions

though, because it seems to me that all electronic music is about developing hallucinatory spaces. We're also publishing a book called *The Order of Sounds* which is by François J. Bonnet, who's a researcher at INA-GRM in Paris, and also records as Kassel Jaeger. It's really one of the few systematic attempts to make a philosophy of sound and hearing, and he also talks about hallucination. The book starts with putting a shell up against your ear and hearing the sea, and asking what that 'hearing' means, what is the status of what is 'heard'.

I think this is a relatively unexplored space in theory, compared to the amount that's been written on the visual arts. The visual arts are tied more heavily to representation than sound. As soon as you have synthesized, or even just recorded, sound you're already in the realm of hallucination, where you have sounds without sources, or rather you have to hypothetically deduce, hallucinate what the sources might be. In Lee's tracks there is generally a very strong feeling of space and physicality which draws you in like that.

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Anyhow it's interesting and really encouraging to hear how the books become a part of the creative process, how they 'infect' it. Most of the time I think philosophers are trying to ignore the signals that you're talking about, because they're trying to reduce the experience of reading down to a series of propositions so as to evaluate and judge it. That's quite right, of course, if you're trying to make some progress in philosophy. But there's definitely another way of reading on the part of people who don't have that kind of investment in the material, picking up these signals that are both conceptual and affective. There are very weird short-circuits that sometimes happen, when words and ideas can become linked with a particular set of sensations without it being explicable. I actually think for that kind of reading the confusion is absolutely a positive thing, and probably a lot of my own pleasure in putting these

things together comes from being on the edge of being baffled and everything falling apart....

Lee, could you say more about the intriguing process of 'research' you talk about above—how the reading/writing interacts with the composition?

LG: Yeah, it's an odd one this, but its something important to me and I think it lays in the 'short-circuits' you talk about. Like, it's not a defined practice. I have interests in things outside of music and art, but I find that much of it ends up feeding back into this thing that I guess I could call my 'work'.

To really switch off and relax I need to watch a Football match, or a cooking program or the news or something like that. What I read is more often than not related to my work, and if not related, it will be something I think may become related if I take it in and allow it to interact with the other stuff. I really think about it as a genuine aspect of composition.

I used the word 'research' in relation to my time with *Fanged Noumena* in particular because of how it focused me on several interests I had at the time; making a new record with a new approach (not abstract, not a specific rule based piece like *Diversions*) but just something new where I was opening up and allowing any of my interests to surface without suppression, memory, entropy, emergence, techno, jungle etc etc....

I was away from any means of making music for a couple of weeks, so this book became a focal point to write ideas down that I could go back to the studio and attempt to create. I don't really know how to explain it fully but this 'research' aspect is one that I just enjoy, generally.

I think there's this binary situation, where there becomes a physical (musical, object)/cerebral (abstract, conceptual) split. Reading about how the brain stores memory for instance, has nothing really to do with music and it's not like I'm trying to transcribe anything literally anyhow. It's a feedback system if you like, and it also comes back to not arranging sound in the way a musician would because i don't know music that way and don't really think of sound in that way.

EB: Do philosophical values bleed into the processes through which you compose? Obviously it's a pretty big leap asserting that what a writer prints comes off the page, into your brain and straight into your music…but what do you think?

LG: I don't know. The value of philosophy for me personally is to be encouraged to question things, to look at any subject from several obtuse angles. I have never formally studied philosophy, like the classic thinkers or anything—so, for me it's quite free of historical association in a way. I'm presuming if you study it and it's history, it becomes like learning another language. My relationship with philosophy is more loose than that—a form of thinking or speculative approach to investigation perhaps….

I'm not sure there's ever been a point where I wanted to literally transcribe something I have read (philosophically or otherwise) into a piece of sound design or music. But, I am constantly motivated by things outside of music. Not having any kind of formal musical training (apart from teaching myself how to DJ)—I guess I look for other ways of organising sound and that can involve 'concept'.

When I was working on the releases I made for Entr'acte, I was reading Philip Ball's *Critical Mass— How One Thing Leads To Another*, which became really important to my mindset as I was approaching the overall structures of the pieces and also the sound design of the individual parts that made them up.

More recently I read Reza Negarestani's piece in *Collapse* VI, 'Undercover Softness: An Introduction To The Architecture And Politics Of Decay'—it made sense to me in relation to my sound work based on the concept of entropy/decay as a form of construction. And I started to rethink some of my earlier experiments with sound design and very small fragments of digital sound, which I would reconstruct into larger audible forms (to get at the raw 'inaudible' fabric of a computer's 'sound').

I got thinking about 1 digital bit (binary digit) of audio as simultaneously its death croak and its first utterance: 1 and/or 0, on and/or off. So, there's this cyclic motion of decay and not just a disintegration to zero. Perhaps, at this micro-level in the analogue

This got me asking myself the question of how sound can become increasingly microscopically grain-like (entropic) and at which point does it reach a bifurcation from its audible form (real) into a purely mathematical abstraction (theoretical)

domain (the real world), there is a type of organic physiology, with the equivalent 'bit's' audibility and existence dependent on the propagation of sound waves, and your physiological capability to hear. This got me asking myself the question of how sound can become increasingly microscopically grain-like (entropic) and at which point does it reach a bifurcation from its audible form (real) into a purely mathematical abstraction (theoretical). If you continually disintegrate, subdivide or bisect a sound, what becomes of these molecular divisions?

So it seems that within any system exhibiting high levels of decay, there's also this element of evolution, as opposed to a more obvious singular notion of a decomposition to nothing.

I guess philosophy and concept aren't something that my work is shouting, rather they are just a part of its anatomy, a part of its language-system, its pharynx, if you like. I'm keen to make it clear that my music is of course simply emotionally driven too. I was making music way before I was reading this kind of material, and it's important to me not to have more straightforward aspects of what I do over-swamped with theory and what could be seen as forcing heady ideas onto what I do, only after the event.

EB: Your ability to simultaneously reconfigure genre detritus on a macro level while paying fine attention to technical detail on a micro level really frames my understanding of your music…assuming you agree to some extent, is this a product of your 'natural' artistic inclinations or rather an a priori concept conceived before production?

LG: I guess the 'macro/micro' aspect of my work I have touched on in the previous answer. But yeah, I'm sure there is some genuine inherent interest

here, which I will just end up finding in the pages of something like *Collapse*, or whatever.

I can really remember having a little epiphany as a kid when I realized that an atom has this center or nucleus and these electrons orbiting it—and my teacher telling me that this is kind of the smallest thing we know. Then, kind of the largest system we know 'the Solar System' sort of works and look's the same, with planets orbiting the Sun. I really remember that totally fucking with my head, like sitting there thinking 'So, are atoms tiny little solar systems, or is the solar system an atom in another physical space?' you know!? I don't reckon moments of utter bewilderment like that ever leave you really, I mean, we still don't really know the answer to that, we now have several theoretical versions of 'The Universe', all of which have been born from years of mathematical testing and all of which could be possible.

I'm becoming more and more aware that the idea of 'another place', a dismantling of one reality into another, is present in my work. These detailed, smaller spaces and the more expansive ones are part of it. Perhaps it's a form of mental escapology. The idea of a system to live under without escape from regulation, red-tape, rules or someone advising you what to feel is disturbing. So, perhaps it's a way of devising something to assist in traversing this world without it swamping you. Something that has always drawn me to art, philosophy, theory, were their natural affection for ambiguity, the grey areas are welcome and you are encouraged to think and work things out for yourself.

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EB: You recently mentioned that you're in the process of writing some sort of text. Can you elaborate on this at all at this time?

LG: Well, I've always written stuff, but I'm definitely no writer—I'm currently working towards creating some works that reach outside of just music. These would make use of language, imagery, installation, and hallucination in some way. I am also attempting

to write a documentary about some research I am involved in with a science institute.

EB: It seems like the concepts of 'avant-garde' and 'experimental' have been expropriated from their producers, that those notions have been repossessed, made over for domination and then given back to the people. I'm a little cynical about how 'challenging' music is experiencing a conspicuous upward swing, and I can't figure out where the power lies and who is really benefitting.

LG: Aren't all genre types and musical forms vulnerable to the market in this way nowadays? I'm not so sure that challenging music really is in an upward swing as you describe though. In London, maybe 10 years ago there was a lot more challenging music around. There were two/three music shops that covered that kind of stuff more exclusively, These Records, Sound 323, more small venues, they're gone now. The mechanisms for the distribution of music to the public are different now, but I'm not convinced that's something specific to any particular genre. Perhaps it's become interesting to a new, different group of listeners though? Music types like this, that aren't tied down to a particular place or mode of engagement, like perhaps, Opera or Classical Music are, are always vulnerable to be taken, re-packaged and re-sold back to you. It's happened with Acid House, Techno, Jungle, Dubstep, Grime.... I think the power for this to happen lies within the dominance of the system it has been born into.

That process where styles that start off hurting your brain become a part of the soundtrack of everyday life, that happens on a collective level too

RM: I don't know enough to say whether there's any crucial change going on right now. But there is a sense in which the destiny of 'challenging' or 'experimental' music is always to make its way, one way or another, into the mainstream. I'm watching a BBC news show right now where they've backed up a montage sequence with 190bpm amen breaks...! That process I was talking about, where styles that start off hurting your brain become a part of the soundtrack of everyday life, that happens on a

collective level too. And of course that's what the avant-garde is supposed to be about: You have people who are working on the edge and whose work can't be accepted, but the point is that innovations or mutations in artistic forms presage wider changes—that's why it's the vanguard! If experimental music just stays in its ghetto then there's also the risk that you end up with a genre—which, as far as I can see, is what has happened with 'noise'—it becomes safe, in its own way. There's the risk that it becomes a set of identifiable poses that are keenly consumed by an in-group who are satisfied with their restricted scene. I try to be a perennial scene-avoider.

LG: I'm totally with you on these kind of hidden innovations in popular music too. What you said got me thinking about that 90's Memphis rap sound, some of which is underpinned by a fantasmogorical horror-fairytale, 'tales from the crypt' type lyricism. Fable like stories of 'creeping around in bushes', 'stalking around dressed in rags', whispered vocals, graveyard imagery. Perhaps it's also indicative of Americas fascination with the hyperreal or a sense of imaginary place, a hidden omnipresent devil etc,?

It's a pretty nailed, oddball aesthetic, expressing this horror of and in 'something'. Some of these 'concepts' just bubble up in a social broth I think, almost as byproducts, which I think is interesting. But when they end up alluding to stuff that came as byproduct and wasn't necessarily the aim, is wickedly sly. I think pop music has the ability to slip subversion in a more indirect way.

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RM: Yeah, and Gravediggaz, Horrorcore—why did that happen there, at that moment? In Gravediggaz there is a kind of hysterical theatrical vocal delivery with the register of the voice flailing up and down like it wants to escape, and the loop begins to feel like it's restrictive and claustrophobic, the whole sound reflects the lyrical content. The 90s Memphis scene is a good example of how impoverishing the

sound can often open things up—there are what sound like cheapo keyboards, corny horror-show piano samples and very rough pitched-down loops. The apparently desultory way it's put together, the way they've abandoned all attempt at polish, is part of the uncanny effect.

You can hear the music finding its consistency and then being refined under the influence of so many forces—the funk fog of performance-engineered grass, the closed environment of a car crawling along on an airless summer night, the identifications between the darkness of horror culture and social reality...all of this circulating in a relatively small community on tapes. Just looking at the tapes and the track names is fascinating.

One of my all-time favourite albums is Genius/GZA's *Liquid Swords*, which has an overall atmosphere that I find utterly compelling and coherent. It's not a 'setting' in the sense of referring to one time or place, and there's no narrative as such. It's an entirely abstract space that involves sound, language, references, and tactile or sensori-motor qualities that run through the whole thing.

At their height Wu-Tang had built their own mythology that superposed their lives and the microculture and the banter and secret language of their crew with this sound RZA developed and these other bits and pieces—comic books, gangster movies, kung-fu movies, and so on. From one point of view those elements are just contingent—it's the stuff they happened to be into stuck together with beats—but they made it gel and it created a whole new reality. Is that a 'concept'? I think when things gel like that there's a consistent concept at work, even if its not articulated as such. The points at which those superpositions lock in, the point where it all hangs together, that's a concept. I'm pretty sure this is how a lot of good writers operate too, even those who are doing theory/philosophy: they immerse themselves, they have a certain amount of faith that all the various things they're interested in fit together somehow, they throw a stack of books into the pot, and they stir it and add ingredients until it starts to turn into a consistent soup....

Kodwo Eshun used to talk about 'sonic fictions', and the CCRU talked about microcultures—the way

that group dynamics give rise to these consistent complexes of feelings, ideas and language. It's a matter of finding that consistency where all the elements work together to make something feel real, and then it starts to dictate its own terms for what can be done next. Anyone who does creative work of any sort understands that process, it's a kind of time-anomaly, when you can feel something that's in the future commanding you to build it.... One of the interesting things about the CCRU was he attempt to think expicitly about those processes and how they work—'coincidence-engineering' or 'hyperstition'. I talked recently with Mark Fisher and Justin Barton about 'On Vanishing Land', which combines a kind of theory-fiction bringing in references from literature, film and music, integrated into a soundtrack by, among others, English Heretic and Gazelle Twin; and we were talking about exactly this, the priceless moment when you just know the right elements are in place and a work becomes something real, and encourages you to keep at it.

LG: I was interested to read that you were looking, with *Collapse/*Urbanomic, for Philosophy to escape its academic, 'professional', institutional setting, its history also, perhaps?

RM: That's a difficult one. As for *Collapse*, I don't think it really succeeded—or could succeed—in 'escaping' entirely, as in some ways its still parasitic on the academy given that a lot of the writers are working in universities. But in itself it doesn't owe any allegiance to those institutions or have to obey their criteria. What would it mean to escape, exactly? In their crazy book *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari propose a 'pop philosophy' that cuts and pastes from the history of philosophy and from other parts of culture, and where you wouldn't be afraid to think for yourself before bowing down to all the 'greats'. It's a nice idea, but (apart from the fact that it was easy for them to say, as well-educated Parisian intellectuals!) in order to really do philosophy, rather than just being a crank with wacky theories or a new age self-help guru or conspiracy theorist or whatever, there's no way around knowing the history, knowing what's happened before and orienting yourself in relation to that history. Isn't it the same in music? You don't want to be just retreading old ground. There are things that people have worked through and worked out before you,

there's that thickness of history that you can engage with and work with—and eventually you realise how you yourself are a product of it. To pretend that you can stand outside that is just arrogant: we are all socialised in a world that has absorbed and been built on a certain cultural history, so none of us are one-off originals with amazing spontaneous ideas. It's like Deleuze said in his book on Francis Bacon: the painter doesn't start with an empty canvas, but with a canvas that's full of clichés and obvious traps you can fall into, so what you need are weapons to help you scrub that away, fight your way through what you're pre-programmed to do.

Having said that, what can definitely be crippling is if the weight of that history paralyzes you, and you feel that you can't think for yourself until you've read this or that (and that list is endless). I know many people who, like me, have at some stage been paralyzed like that when studying philosophy at university. But that's maybe more to do with a social and institutional framework, and certain people's attitudes, than with the subject itself. Ultimately we would all like to be able to handle these heavy philosophical ideas as if they were light, to get a grip on them in a way that would allow us to construct something new with them, and just start synthesizing. Like any other practice, that kind of facility doesn't come easy. And if you discard what are sometimes seen as the 'repressive' tools of argument, critique, and logic, you just end up with a situation where the criteria are just what's trendy and who can shout loudest.... For myself, what's most precious is to meet someone who comes from outside that world, but who can show or tell me something that helps me go back to those stiff, calcified ideas and loosen them up, handle them in a different way, and maybe make something new. When those rare meetings happen, I totally get a crush on them and I only have to hope that it's mutual!

So, I'm really for the idea that anyone can engage with philosophy and that people from different backgrounds and practices can contribute, but there has to be an acknowledgement that a lot of pretty smart people have already thought about this stuff before you; and there has to be some-thing to test concepts against. Again, no doubt there is a parallel with music: there's that mad-scientist stage of brewing shit up, but there's also got to be some kind of

reckoning as to whether you've just ended up making something that sounds like bad ambient techno from 1990. Ultimately the question: Does this add anything new? is simultaneously the question: Does this open up any kind of interesting conversation with what went before (not just repeating it, but not pretending to 'escape' it completely)? As can be heard very clearly in your work, I think.

LG: It seems to me that we are in such an intriguing time for new philosophy and thought to appear? New political structures, new technological advancements, (we are on Mars now), landing on comets, the unraveling of our understanding of the beginning of the Universe, developments in robotics…I mean, there seems a lot!? Many areas seemingly ripe for thought.

Do you feel this too?

The horizons of our knowledge are beyond anything we could have dreamt of, but most of it is not in the head, and certainly not in any one person's head

RM: Yeah, and most of that isn't happening in philosophy departments, that's for sure! The interesting thing is, who or what is thinking today? Most of these endeavours—robotics and AI, space travel, telecommunications—are achievements of humans enhanced by technology, and the human part is increasingly little more than a facilitator for machines working on other machines. You can see that just looking inside an iPhone: all these thousands of components squeezed into a tiny space, the whole layout of it has been worked out by algorithms, all the tolerances of the components and the wiring have been worked out automatically by other machines. None of that is the work of an unassisted human engineer. And then when we use these devices, a lot of the time we ourselves are just like nodes relaying information from one part of the network to another. So on one hand the horizons of our knowledge are beyond anything we could have dreamt of, but on the other, it's certainly not 'knowledge' in the sense in which it would have been understood pre-Industrial-Revolution. Most of it is not in the head, and certainly not in any one person's head.

There can be a massively dystopian element to this, needless to say. In 2014 we published T*o Live and Think Like Pigs*, a book written in 1998 by a mathematician and philosopher Gilles Châtelet, which is incredibly prescient: he talks about market 'democracy' as breeding a whole population of 'neurolivestock', just brains that are fattened up and used to extract value.…

As for philosophy, it would be sad to think that all it can do is to stand outside of all this and pass judgment in some kind of solemn, ponderous way. Probably the form of philosophical thought needs to change too, and we haven't even started with that. There's no point bemoaning it, let's just admit that none of us can possibly do philosophy in the way someone in the eighteenth century did, in their study with a quill-pen and a candle.… Despite its radical claims, in some ways it's one of the last bastions of the old conception of thinking as a kind of meditative reflection done by a solitary subject. The web, social media, and so on, are changing that a bit, I think, but there's relatively little cooperation or collaboration in this field (as opposed to science where you'll see papers co-authored by twenty people). And why shouldn't we be able to build machines for enhancing philosophical thought—augmented philosophizing!

LG: And what place do you think classic western thought still has, in relation to these hyper-fast moving, (unknown) subjects?

RM: There's certainly a sense in which 'the subject,' 'nature,' and so on, as they were schematised by classical and modern philosophy, are historical constructs, and that's more obvious than ever. That's again to do with the same processes of enhanced cognition: as Marx said, the effect of the massive ramified system of machines that now cover the planet is that the human being becomes more and more of a socio-technological creature (the social and the technological can't be distinguished any longer). In this supposed age of the individual, we are more interdependent than ever, and are all reliant on these planetary-scale operations in our everyday lives. As subjects we are splintered and smeared out over webs of communication that keep on shifting our identity even while we sleep. In a certain sense, the more we advance in our understanding

of ourselves and our world, the more perplexed we become.

At every stage of development of modern philosophy, it has run parallel with Science Fiction: SF extrapolates what it sees in the present and dramatises it as a speculative future

As soon as the industrial revolution kicked off, philosophy realised it had to learn to build history and change into its thinking: it had to realise that it couldn't deal with eternal abstract principles but had to understand the emergence of the new, the continually shifting relation between knowledge and reality, and the historical nature of the human subject. So at every stage of development of modern philosophy, it has run parallel with Science Fiction: SF extrapolates what it sees in the present and dramatises it as a speculative future. In a similar way, philosophy examines the subjects, perceptions and knowledges that are contemporary with it, and draws the most radical conclusions, making us unfamiliar and alien to ourselves, showing us how the traditional, inherited image of the human and of the world that we continue to perpetuate is just a comforting mask. So at its best, just like SF, and just like abstract sound, the speed of thought of philosophy allows it to outrun the present.