The Redhead Review: Popular Cultural Studies and Accelerated Modernity

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Steve Redhead is an innovator in cultural studies. Currently, he is Professor of Sport and Media Cultures in the Chelsea School at the University of Brighton. He has enormous influence on the study of popular culture, music, and sport. By forming the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture at Manchester Metropolitan University in the early 1990s, he created a hub for popular cultural studies that mobilised alliances between researchers, artists, and government agencies. The Blackwell book series is testament to the legacy of this period. These texts reshaped research into popular culture. Students still read and refer to *The Clubcultures Reader* and *From Subculture to Clubcultures: An Introduction to Popular Cultural Studies.*[1] As an advisor to city councils and the U.K. government for their creative industries policies, Redhead has had significant input into the shape and nature of sports tourism in Manchester, the management of musical hubs, and the activation of cultural networks. This role has been replicated in Canada and Australia.

Throughout his long academic and professional career, Steve Redhead has been influenced by the works of Paul Virilio. In 2004, he crystallized that connection by writing two books on the esteemed French urban and cultural theorist — *Paul Virilio: Theorist for an Accelerated Culture* and *The Paul Virilio Reader*.[2] I met with Steve Redhead early one Wednesday morning in March 2005 in Perth, Western Australia, to discuss the process of writing Virilio. Perched on a big black leather couch and surrounded by books too numerous to count and piled twenty high, I asked Steve Redhead about his life and learning. The following is a verbatim transcript of the interview, edited for length.

How did you first consider activating the connections between sport and popular culture?

The background that I had was that I did a law degree at a very elitist university — The University of Manchester. And in that period of three or four years, in the early 1970s, there was a lot of work going on within the sociology of law and the sociology of deviance — criminology. Even though the degree that I did was incredibly traditional, the sociology of law and sociology of deviance were disciplines which were coming into those teaching subjects from left-field and they were the background that

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[1] Steve Redhead, Derek Wynne, and Justin O'Connor, eds., *The Clubcultures Reader: Readings in Popular Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); *Subculture to Clubcultures: An Introduction to Popular Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

[2] Steve Redhead, *Paul Virilio: Theorist for an Accelerated Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); as editor, *The Paul Virilio Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

allowed me to start thinking about youth culture in general. So it was really youth subcultures, although it wouldn't necessarily have been formed in that way then. That was the background that I was coming from and the literature in those areas was really burgeoning at that time. So, something like football hooliganism, which was what I was interested in as a topic and was heavily in the media at that time became an object of study within sociology of law/sociology of deviance. It allowed me to think of topics which wouldn't have necessarily been within any law curriculum at that time — sport and popular culture. So what I started to do and other people around the world started to do as well, was to graft issues to do with popular culture including sport into those sorts of areas. Football hooliganism was an example but we started to think more broadly within sociology of law and criminology. At that very time, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham was doing work on youth culture and youth subcultures but also more broadly on sport and popular culture, although I didn't know it. I was starting to read the *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* Birmingham produced in the early 70s, that had existed for quite a few years.[3] It was the work started by Richard Hoggart carried on by Stuart Hall and all the others that got me interested in sport and popular culture. But I'd already started to do it within sociology of law and sociology of deviance — and that is still what I do — but that came really quite obliquely from what I was interested in.

How important was it at the time to be writing about sport?

I did a PhD — once I'd done the work at the University of Manchester — including my Masters degree. I was lucky enough to get a grant to go and be a student at the University of Warwick. The area that I was working in was in both departments — sociology and law. I wanted to do empirical work in the football industry. The way I started to do it was around the industrial relations of the football industry. But there was also work on hooliganism — fandom — that I was doing as well. But I was restricted within the British university system at that time. You certainly had to be reasonably careful about what kind of PhDs you were doing. It was really about the industrial relations of the football industry. So from within that study I was looking at all kinds of aspects of the history of sport and history of popular culture including football.

It was a great period being able to study with the department at Warwick University. There were fantastic people that I worked with and there was all this work going on at Birmingham which was a few miles away, although there was a lot of tension between Warwick University and Birmingham University. I remember the sociology department at Warwick University— 10, 15 miles away — invited people from Birmingham Centre to discuss conflict. The interesting thing is that in both those places some really interesting work was going on.

What was the conflict about? Was it an intellectual conflict?

Yeah, I think probably it was. Certainly in the sociology department at Warwick you had Simon Frith and Paul Corrigan and those who were certainly very influential on me and on youth culture writing for a long time. They were taking a much more sociological viewpoint about youth culture and music and popular culture than the Birmingham people were. The Birmingham Centre had its line if you like, and they *were* quite in conflict. So someone like Frith who worked in sociology of youth and sociology of music, at some point never really resolved the conflicts that he had with someone like Stuart Hall. They were interesting intellectual conflicts. But I think that's what they were.

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[3] The *Working Papers* were a series of publications emerging out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. They were stencilled occasional papers.

But because I was a young student I was incredibly lucky to be involved in those events and just being around at that time made a lot of difference. It set me thinking about ways in which you could develop your own trajectory and sport and popular culture were certainly right at the centre of it although they weren't necessarily being talked about in those ways then. To some extent in Britain now with the RAE [Research Assessment Exercise] it's gone back to being very disciplinary — you know, the disciplines — law, sociology, and so on. But the really interesting thing at that time — the mid-70s in Britain — was that interdisciplinary work, particularly within a hybrid guerrilla discipline like cultural studies was just knocking all the barriers down. It was wonderful, absolutely brilliant, and Paul and others were really responsible for that. Getting something like the *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* and the *Resistance Through Rituals* double volume which was 7 and 8 [of the *Working Papers* series],[4] I remember getting that through the door, being sent it — and realising you could do that work at that time in mid-1970s was astonishing. All the barriers seem to be knocked down. So the interests that I had, particularly around sport and popular culture, were suddenly opened up and as areas that I could teach and research and work in, so it was absolutely fantastic.

How was your work received at this time?

Certainly in the mid-70s, I was a young postgraduate student and I felt that if I got into academia and I got an academic job which was at Manchester Polytechnic at the time — what became Manchester Metropolitan University — I could see a way of doing work that I was interested in without necessarily copying these other traditions which were associated with the sociology department at Warwick and the cultural studies one at Birmingham for example. I could see ways in which you could teach and research in these sorts of areas over a long period but without necessarily repeating what had been done. But it certainly took me a long time. I had a hugely heavy teaching timetable. It takes time to get the confidence to write and to research in your own area. I was doing my postgraduate [degree] and finishing it off part-time and I was doing a lot of that work, reading absolutely everything in all of these interdisciplinary areas but also doing a lot of empirical work on the football industry and teaching all hours of the night.

It took a long to time to get to a point where I could see that you could build something which hadn't been done before. You could do it with research students and you could start to chip away at these areas that I was interested in. I suppose it wasn't until the mid-80s that I started to really do that and once I finished my PhD, Pluto Press were interested in publishing it. I couldn't get it published by all the academic presses that I went to. But Pluto Press were very heavily involved in the Socialist Workers Party — international socialists at that time. They were a Trotskyist press really. They had also published things like Sheryl Garrett and Sue Stewards' *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered* which was about women and popular music and also David Toop's first volume of *The Rap Attack* and they were the books of choice at the time.[5] I just thought they were wonderful books and when I got the chance to talk to Pluto Press in 1984 just at the start of the miner's strike — which politically in Britain was starting almost a civil war — they commissioned a book which became *Sing When You're Winning.*[6] It was designed in exactly the same way, or virtually the same way as *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered* was and also *The Rap Attack* was. It was absolutely brilliant to be able to work in a publishing house which

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[4] Tony Jefferson and Stuart Hall, eds., "Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain," *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, no. 7/8 (Birmingham: The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1975).

[5] Sheryl Garrett and Sue Steward, *Signed, Sealed, Delivered: True Life Stories of Women in Pop* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); David Toop, *The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

[6] Steve Redhead, *Sing When You're Winning: The Last Football Book* (London: Pluto Press, 1987).

had that kind of background. The ideas I was starting to develop and think about for the long term were actually able to get across in what should have been a popular book. That was absolutely fantastic.

But they actually went bust three times. Pluto Press went bust three times within two years. With the miners strike, politically things were all over the place and Pluto were just bankrupt and I lost loads of money through it and also lost a lot of time. So when *Sing When You're Winning* came out — it came out in 1987, which was my first book — that was already two, two and a half years out of date. But I could still see that there was a trajectory there. It was just that because it was slightly out of date and also the politics of football hooliganism in the Thatcher regime were just absolutely fraught with difficulty. She was going for everybody and I got absolutely hammered in the press as if I was going "native" as a football hooligan. Writing about the positives of football at all at that time was incredibly difficult.

I'm pleased with that book. It actually stands up quite well — looking back at it. It was funny. It used people like Ray Lowry a cartoonist — we actually used his cartoons — he never got paid. But to work with someone like that and also have it graphically designed meant that the ideas got across even if they were hammered a lot of the time. There wasn't a real space for people starting within these traditions. You had to be established in established universities to get ideas across. Somewhere like the Norman Chester Centre at Leicester University for example was defined by the media as the place to go to if you wanted to have something to say about football. So it was very difficult for younger academics, particularly at that time, to get into the media and to get into academic journals as well to say something different.

So in some ways, I used *Sing When You're Winning* as kind of Trojan horse — as a deliberately popular book — to get ideas which were unconventional at that time about sport and popular culture into mainstream discussion and I got absolutely crucified in the process. But I think it was an interesting experience. People on the academic side thought it was too populist and the journalists thought it was too academic. You know, the usual kind of problem. But at least I was able to get what became a trajectory into popular discourse, and that was certainly an experience I've never forgotten and I've learned from it.

Do you think you made a difference? Do you think that you were able to intervene into how fans of sport were seen?

Yeah, I think that because it was such a politicised area, fandom started — though people would not have used that word then — but what I later called postfandom, which was the ironic thinking about the way that you became a fan and the way that mixed in with problems of hooliganism and problems of the criminal law. At that time, it was so politicised to actually talk about that. Football hooligans were the enemy within for Thatcher. But the politicising of it meant that you were starting to work with very different kinds of theoretical discourses. You were having to deal with something which was very different from what the Birmingham School started with in the early 70's, for example.

John Clarke and others who were writing about football hooliganism with the Birmingham School and people who were writing about sociology of sport generally from the 1960s onwards hadn't had to deal with this kind of full-on political onslaught on aspects of working class culture because that was what Thatcher was trying to destroy. She was trying to destroy unions but she was also trying to destroy aspects of popular culture and at that time the politicising of the whole area meant that you had to rethink some of the theoretical traditions.

I came from the left and the political traditions that the left were working with were collapsing by the day and it made people rethink the kind of theoretical work that you were trying to draw on. But

also we were heavily — people that I worked with at Manchester Polytechnic at that time — we were also quite heavily involved in starting to look at ethnographies and the ethnographic traditions, participant observation traditions which I got from sociology of deviance and from the Birmingham School, and the long history of sociological work in the twentieth century. I started to work around really being part of that culture. Not necessarily just me but other people as well. So you were packing yourself off as part of fan groups, not so much hooligan groups, but fan groups certainly. And that kind of ethnography as a methodology actually became really important. It became politicised because people weren't supposed to be part of these so-called deviant groups.

I'd like to move on and talk a little bit about music and I want you to talk to me a little about what was it like writing about music while you were living and working in the middle of such an important time for music in Manchester.

That was a privilege really. The work we were doing on football and sport had certainly by the late 1980s become part of the general popular culture work which eventually became "Madchester."[7] But in the early 1970s when I started working on these things, sport and music were completely separate. For instance, people like Simon Frith who were writing about music, weren't interested in sport at all. And most people going through schools were either sports fans or music fans.

I think one of the things about what eventually became labelled Madchester was that the two actually came together. *Sing When You're Winning* was an early way of talking about the two cultures and how they were coming together. In the 1970s, they were seen as separate. Sociologists wouldn't be writing about both, they would be writing about one or the other. So that's one of the things that made us feel privileged. We were part of a culture which was breaking those barriers down — breaking barriers down within low culture, within popular culture. It wasn't just the barriers between high and low culture. So the link between popular music and sport within low culture was what we were really interested in. And it was such a fast changing relationship — Madchester had gone by the time the media had picked it up — but there were all sorts of changes in youth culture and popular music underneath all that.

It was absolutely fantastic. I was born in 1952 so by the time punk came around, I was 24/25. In that particular revolution, particularly living in Manchester 1976/77, I went to clubs like the Electric Circus and all the places where punk really was generated. By the late 1980s, I was much older than that. That's not to say that we didn't go to things or that people who were older than I was weren't involved, but as a specifically youth culture moment, it was left for younger writers to write about those things and certainly younger academics. [Until] we developed the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, we didn't really write about it — it was younger journalists — someone like Sarah Champion who we worked with quite a bit — she was a 16- or 17- year-old journalist at the time in the late 1980s. But we were certainly part of that. We went to things. It was also interesting that by that time, academics in general were seen to be, particularly at the Birmingham School for Contemporary Cultural Studies, as having long lost its ability to be part of something at that kind of level.

So I spotted a gap in the market. It seemed that all these things were happening, me and my friends knew about those things, but academia had completely lost its grip and there weren't a lot of grants around for ethnographers. The work was really not being done on those phenomenal changes in popular music and popular culture that you could see in Manchester at that time. You could see it

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[7] "Madchester" is the term given to the musical explosion in Manchester from the early to mid-1980s to the early 1990s from the beginning of Factory Records with Joy Division, New Order, and The Happy Mondays to the emergence of Rave culture activated through The Hacienda Nightclub.

in other cities as well but Manchester was a leading example of it. So it was left to journalists to talk about those things.

What we were doing particularly at Manchester Polytechnic in the late 1980s, was doing what would now be called cultural mapping. So we were working on things like a project called "A Culture Industry" which became published as a report. It was mapping all the different aspects of media and popular music as industries within the Manchester region. It was reasonably good sociological/empirical work — but the really interesting thing was that gave us an inroad into the media. They would come and talk to us as academics who were writing about these sorts of things. But at that time, there was very little ethnographic work being done on Madchester and the history of that. That was done in retrospect.

So in hindsight, how important was it to mark this moment in time?

I think it was very important academically, definitely. Part of the shifts in the study of popular culture which we were trying to trace then involved asking questions about the theoretical explanations of how subcultures work or how popular culture works. I do think aspects of this mixing of low culture actually did shatter traditional discourses about popular culture within the academy and it wasn't just that people had become too old to do ethnographies. They'd actually lost the plot theoretically as well. We were starting to question the ways say the School for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham had developed its perspective on youth and popular culture. Interesting as it was, we were starting to question the ways that those theoretical traditions could be applied to things we were seeing around us on the street and in clubs in Manchester. So there really did seem to be a theoretical gap as well as this methodological point that people young enough weren't really doing ethnographies. So I think it was an important watershed in the thinking about popular culture within sociology or cultural studies.

Do you think you had a lasting impact on how Manchester is now imagined in other parts of the world and how that time is imagined?

What we were able to do was by the time that everything had disappeared, we were able to set up research centres which did eventually, over a period, produce enough work about popular cultural history of that moment to be able to sell that idea. We became part of the marketing for city imaging. But I think it had a time-line. The Unit for Law and Popular Culture which was the first research centre that I set up in Manchester Polytechnic was actually set up in 1990 and by that time I'd written *End-of-the-Century Party*[8] which was really about things happening up to Acid House. Acid House happened in 1987, '88, '89. *The End-of-the-Century Party* was really about the socio-political conditions that allowed Acid House to emerge.

But The Unit for Popular Culture which came on the back of that was set up as a research centre to attract postgraduate students to do the work to repair these gaps that I've been talking about. At the same time, my sociological colleague Derek Wynne set up a centre called the Centre for Urban and Cultural Artists — CUCA, in the acronym. What they did they were doing on the back of the culture industry study which was the study that we'd done — the cultural mapping study. What eventually happened was that we mashed those two together. Partly because Manchester Polytechnic became Manchester Metropolitan University in 1992 when polytechnics became universities, and the university needed a kind of flagship or series of flagship research centres to compete with the

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[8] Steve Redhead, *The End-of-the-Century Party: Youth and Pop Towards 2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

traditional universities. Manchester Institute for Popular Culture which we set up was actually the mashing together of those two pre-existing centres. And we were winging it because by 1992, Factory Records, for example, were in real trouble. They actually went bankrupt later in that year about six or seven months after we set [the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture] up and the way we were envisioning things was to repair the gaps theoretically and methodologically that had emerged since the mid-1970s in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham — we weren't trying to be something like that because it was a major project — but we were set up to repair some of those gaps. And increasingly in journals, say like *Theory, Culture and Society* which had already been going about ten years by 1992, you could see that there was this incredibly theoreticist project going on. There was lots of very high level theory but no empirical work at all on culture and popular culture. What we were really trying to do was use our base in Manchester to start to do some good empirical and theoretical work on what had happened. The whole thing was so fast — the whole Acid House thing was so fast — and rave was so fast — that by the time we set ourselves up in 1992 as the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, those things had gone.

One of the first books we wrote for the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, which was part of a series, was called *Rave Off*[9] and it was a joke because the idea was that it had gone, the whole point of it had gone. It is a really difficult thing. What I now call accelerated culture or accelerated modernity which is my phrase for what I would have called popular culture in the past, is so fleeting, it is almost by definition a blur. But to methodologically get that, to fix it, to pluck it out of the air and to theorise it is incredibly difficult. The more staged work within sociology, within cultural studies, is so much easier because the thing isn't a blur — or it isn't a blur anymore — you're looking back at working class culture in the 1930s or something, you're looking at an object which hasn't sped up anymore. But what we were looking at was something — particularly through the media — that was at such an accelerated velocity that we were stunned. And it was very difficult to capture it. We were capturing it after the event and then that got globalised. So to some extent we were part of the re-imaging of a city like Manchester and its culture. That was an odd process to be part of something like that — you were part of the marketing.

What led you to Virilio?

What I did was in the mid-1990s at the end of the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture mark 1,[10] what I wanted to do was to stand back a bit, and work out more rigorously the theoretical tradition that I was working within and how I could really push on and develop the work on modernity, postmodernity, and popular culture that I'd done in the eye of the storm — very often too quickly. I wanted to sit back and start to do some more rigorous academic work on the rethinking of popular culture and cultural theory in general.

Virilio is somebody I've used a lot and I'd really plundered. But I felt at the time that I hadn't really gone into — and probably no-one else had in the mid-1990s — the intellectual biography of someone like that. I was always interested in doing that sort of work. I was really influenced by books like David Macey's book on Foucault for example. Intellectual biographies were something that I had read till they came out of my ears and I always thought that Virilio was an interesting individual

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[9] Steve Redhead, *Rave Off: Politics and Deviance in Contemporary Youth Culture* (Vermont: Avebury, Aldershot, and Brookfield, 1993).

[10] The Manchester Institute for Popular Culture [MIPC] morphed over time as it was influenced by internal and external factors. The MIPC mark 1 was devoted to examining the divisions within popular culture, explored fandom through participant observation, and conducted cultural mapping. Later the MIPC was driven by the financial needs of Manchester Metropolitan University and shaped its researched to a more marketable and financially viable institute.

anyway. I was using lines in books that he's written and I wasn't really sure where the stuff was coming from and nobody had really written about him in that way.

I was asked by Sage in about 1995 to review a proposal for cultural theories or social theorist's theories and the document that I was looking at didn't have anything on Virilio and I said to them you know "this seems really odd. Virilio's a really interesting guy, people are always quoting him, why shouldn't he be up there in the series alongside Baudrillard, Foucault, Bourdieu, or whoever?" He's one of the few theorists — at least then — he was one of the few French theorists who hadn't really been written about very much. Mid-1995, I actually talked to Sage about doing a book which eventually became *Paul Virilio: Theorist for an Accelerated Culture* about ten years later. They were very pleased with the proposal and I went to readers and at least one came back and said: "Why should anybody be interested in Virilio?" So it was actually turned down at the time because they didn't think they could sell it.

Within a few years, John Armitage — a British academic in the cultural studies, cultural politics area — started writing about Virilio for Sage much more extensively. So it was interesting that they did do the work although it wasn't a single authored book. But I was particularly interested in Virilio for my project, for looking at low culture and he's a high modernist so it's an odd kind of mixing. But I was interested because a lot of what I'd done on theoretical work to do with popular culture being a blur, about it being accelerated culture, was illuminated by some of what Virilio had said in his little books that were really difficult to get hold of at the time — Semiotext(e) books — literally little black books from Semiotext(e), the U.S. publishers — they used to do a lot of stuff on Baudrillard and Virilio. That was where we got most of our stuff from in the early 1990s. But Virilio was an interesting theorist, I thought, for what I call the disappearance of popular culture. In some ways, he was a more sound theorist than someone like Baudrillard on that. I had been reading a lot of that work at the time so I thought even though Sage aren't going to do it, I would still work on this project over a long period of time.

In some ways, it was an intellectual biography although there is biographical work in there — it isn't really a life-in-work book, *Paul Virilio: Theorists for Accelerated Culture*. But it was a way of starting to rethink what I had already done about popular culture, about theorising popular culture and seeing whether I could actually use resources from French social theory which I was really interested in and any resources from social theory that was left in the decimation that had happened after postmodernism. I think it was almost like you were laying waste to all these theoretical discourses which you thought were reasonably stable — Marxism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and so on. These were suddenly wiped away by the postmodern cyclone in the 1990s — and in many ways, rightly so. Those major theoretical traditions have all sorts of problems with them. But you were almost picking at straws in this theoretical nuclear winter — Virilio was one of them. It's interesting that *now* he's written about a lot. The idea of writing about him was definitely for me a detour to the side to see what he really said about the kind of work I'd written about and whether his work was a useful resource for the long-term project about popular culture and sport I'd entered into thirty years before.

How does a politics of what you call "accelerated modernity" connect to the rest of your canon of work?

When Edinburgh University Press did the first Virilio book, they were very interested in doing something else with me because of the difficulty of getting Virilio in English particularly for students 'round the world. We talked about doing a reader — which is the second book. But at the same time, I started to — as with many other academics — rethink my position on postmodernity, postmodernism, and so on.

In particular British social theories, the kind of influences of John Urry, Scott Lash, and all those sort of people — *Theory, Culture and Society* as a journal maybe — were the centres of that work say at Lancaster and Goldsmith in Britain. The work that was going on around late 1990s, early 2000s was a rethinking of people's attitude with the theoretical traditions around postmodernism, postmodernity, and so on. And a lot of those theorists started not to use the term postmodern anymore or postmodernity. They were dissatisfied with it. They were rethinking modernity. And I started to, particularly when I was going deep into the work around Virilio, who is very much a modernist — I think it's completely wrong to label him a postmodernist or poststructuralist — he comes from a completely different tradition — but he is certainly a high modernist and I got interested in rethinking my attitude to postmodernity and postmodernism especially in its relationship to popular culture.

What I was trying to do with both the Virilio books was to find a new way of thinking about popular culture. So I would use the term accelerated culture which someone like Douglas Coupland used in *Generation X*[11] in the early 1990s but accelerated culture or what I now call accelerated modernity is what I theorised as popular culture before. I don't think you can talk in terms popular cultural industries, for example. The creative industries project has been interesting for the study of popular culture. But over the thirty year period that I'm talking about, popular culture has become mainstream. The aspect of popular culture that I was interested in which would prick the mainstream — it was a political project that I was interested in — seems to have become less and less and less — the moments of punk and Acid House and Hip Hop, for example, are less and less and less. I'm not saying they're not effective when they happen but I think that something like *The End-of-the-Century Party* — the argument that I made in the late 1980s — is right. Accelerated culture is cyclical. Culture will actually hit the wall at some stage, and in many ways in popular culture we've hit the wall. So it's a matter of hybridity, it's actually going back. Popular culture is interesting when it picks and mixes from the past. It's very difficult for it to go forward in any kind of linear direction.

Accelerated modernity or accelerated culture is actually something more general within our culture. It's actually a process, the speeding up of technology particularly, but also of media and military technology which is what Virilio I think gives us. He doesn't necessarily give us it deliberately or explicitly but it helps us rethink modernity. In the work from British sociology — John Urry, Scott Lash, and others — Lash is an American, but works in Britain — from within the kind of theoretical tradition of a journal like *Theory, Culture and Society*, using people like Zygmunt Bauman, for example, Ulrich Beck and these sorts of writers — the ones who rethought modernity in a very interesting way still have a problem it seems to me. What they're actually not able to do is show us when what Beck calls first modernity becomes second modernity, or what Bauman calls solid modernity becomes liquid modernity or whatever. I think there are a whole host of binaries there and most of the interesting sociological figures rethink it in these terms. Late modernity's another one; Anthony Giddens talks about late modernity: when the hell is that? It seems to me that they're rezoning modernity and I always thought of postmodernity and postmodernism as something which kind of jokily poked at the edges of modernity.

But I do think there is only modernity. I'm not religious like Virilio. I really do think there is only modernity. After that there's nothing. But a way of rethinking that modernity is to pick from somebody like Virilio and develop what I have called accelerated modernity. But I don't think that accelerated modernity is something like late modernity or liquid modernity. Accelerated modernity has been there always. Modernity has always been speeded up. So if you take modernity whenever you want to say tradition metamorphoses into modernity — 1750 in Manchester for example — whenever we want to periodize it. I think the really interesting issue is that modernity doesn't

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[11] Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (London: Abacus, 1991).

transpose itself into something after modernity. It doesn't go into postmodernity — certainly in my argument it doesn't — and what we need to understand more is what modernity is about and I certainly followed, particularly in the Virilio work, someone like John Gray who I think is an interesting political theorist as somebody who has come from the right but is actually astute on capitalism. He talks about the way there are capitalisms and I do think that's becoming more and more manifest — there's an American capitalism, a Chinese capitalism, an Australian capitalism, a Malaysian capitalism, and so on — although they're not necessarily always national. But I do think there are capital*isms*. And I also think there are modern*ities*. I just think that's another aspect of that detour — the work that I did around Virilio which has made me think there are ways in which you can understand modernity differently and particularly around popular culture.

Popular culture is still as important as the object as it's ever been. But I think you get stuck in talking about these as industries. It is a problem. I find myself stuck in that. I've done consultancies and people say "how can we make profits out of this industry?" And that's what you get stuck with. But popular culture still it seems to me — although it's more and more mainstream — it is still one of the interesting aspects of modernities and I think there is still an aspect that we can hang onto somewhere as a politics — it's difficult, but after that Virilio detour, I think that's where I feel I am.

How does Virilio help us post-9/11?

I certainly became interested in Virilio twenty years ago. The idea of the two books is to provide an accessible introduction to Virilio. People have written highly theoretical work on Virilio in all sorts of very interesting ways but I also think he's been misinterpreted — as a poststructuralist, a postmodernist and so on. There are all sorts of problems with him. It's heavily religious theoretical work. There really are all sorts of political problems.

What he's interesting for is particularly the way he talks about military technology and the media. He gives us a new perspective on that. I don't think you can just be *Virilian* and you're alright. I think there are all sorts of problems with that. The focus on military technology and the media is really interesting. In particular, his idea of how the media conflates what he calls the accident — which is not just what we would call a car accident or something — it's a more philosophical perspective for him which really comes from phenomenology — French phenomenology — which is his background. He shows us how the media conflates the accident with the attack particularly because news is travelling so fast and you're seeing things live. He's very good on the perspective which basically says the globe has shrunk. Technology, particularly through the media — satellite technology — has shrunk the globe so that we are almost in what he calls the "city of the instant." 9/11 was certainly an example of the city of the instant. Billions of people around the world on their mobile phones or TVs or satellite programs actually seeing the second attack live.

Politically, I'm not sure how much he helps us after 9/11. I think someone like Chomsky — Noam Chomsky who he's often compared to — has also written interestingly about American foreign policy. I think a lot of the time writers like Chomsky, writers like Virilio, are writing at such a level of abstraction that the really interesting questions about 9/11 — like actually who did this and what countries were involved and what secret services were involved — all the interesting political questions aren't really answered by these kinds of theories.

In my view, Virilio has a lot to say as an unconventional media theorist and he's been saying those things — as I've tried to show in the two books — for a long time and I think what people are now starting to do is jump on the Virilio bandwagon. It's happened before but I think it's particularly happening now. There's a conference in England going on now (which is March 2005) which is called "The Dromocratic Condition." International academics at that conference are looking at Virilio's idea

of the speeded-up society — the dromocratic society. But actually, if you look at the two books I wrote, particularly the Reader, the idea of dromology — a dromocratic society, a society of acceleration — was a very small part of his work from the 1950s to the twenty-first century. He wrote about that specifically in the little books of the 1970s. But it's very ill-developed. It's like an idea that he had and then he moved onto the next thing which is very much his methodology.

To say after postmodernity and all those debates, let's look at the idea of the speeded-up society as a ready-made thing after what we knew as modernity — that's not necessarily going to help us using Virilio in that way. But because of the way that international academia works, he is one of the theorists that hasn't really been written about much and my books are very much a part of that project. They are actually going to expose him more and that's great. For students and staff in universities and the general reader it's interesting but I do think there is a tendency now with Virilio getting more of the focus for particular bits of his work to be used in this kind of meta-theoretical way. He's the new global theorist. I just don't think he fits that. I don't think you can satisfactorily write that. But I do think that some things about the way in which he shows the media as speeded up is very interesting and we can take that as something to focus on after 9/11. I'm not sure how much more useful he is than that.

Virilio never trained as an architect but exerted major influence over how the discipline was taught in university and how cities designed their landscapes. What do you think made him such an important individual in architecture?

He definitely didn't train as an architect though he hung 'round in his friend's — Claude Parent, who was a French architect — office in the 1960s. Virilio was a stained glass painter and had done some phenomenology at the University of the Sorbonne, but he was an artist. And I think you've still got to see him like that rather than as a social theorist and that's why this idea of the dromocratic condition is a nonsense really. He's an interesting artist that pokes at modernity and he certainly was poking at the architect's office with Parent in the mid-1960s. A story which I was told — which may be apocryphal but it actually fits — Parent told Virilio not to go into the office anymore because he was so pessimistic and so depressing that Parent's workers, his assistants couldn't get any work done. He's a really odd historical character in the history of modernism and French architecture. But Parent was actually a professional architect. When they worked together Virilio and Parent certainly did design some interesting buildings. Their idea of the function of the oblique which is really getting rid of horizontality and bits of verticality as well but basically the idea was to get rid of horizontality so buildings would come up out of the floor. The idea that they had particularly in this utopian architectural system was about the body in movement. Certainly, Virilio and Parent thought interestingly about those things and as utopian architects of the 1950s and '60s they are really interesting in lots of ways. Parent has carried on today — he's in his 80s — he has carried on as a professional architect building interesting buildings.

But Virilio has always actually been seen — quite rightly — as a professor of architecture. That's what he was. He was elected by the students after May 1968 but he had no professional training as an architect. He retired in the late 1990s as an emeritus professor. He spent thirty years at the special School of Architecture in Paris and was developing all different sorts of aspects on the cultural and aesthetic theory and injected politics into those realms. He was teaching architects and architectural students and occasionally wrote about urban planning and the city. I mean he's interesting when he does that. But it's dabbling really. Parent was the most interesting in many ways. He was the professional architect who carried on doing professional architecture still working in modernist architecture in Paris and in other European cities.

When you read the long interviews with Virilio by people like Sylvère Lotringer, particularly the ones in Semiotext(e) and French theorist Philippe Petit, that is the best way to read Virilio I think if people can get hold of those, but there he is actually really interesting in what he calls the city of the instant and he certainly had lots of things to say about the way that modern cities developed — the urban condition and so on. But very often it's so oblique and at such a level of generality that in practice it's actually not very helpful. Although he has done lots of social justice work — he has worked with homeless people in France for a very long time; his Catholic background means that he has lots of social justice projects and interests — but he is a very odd figure to use as a social theorist. He has an idea, it comes at you from left field, and then it goes and he's moved onto something else. The consistent thing that he's been is what he would call a "critic of the art of technology." I think that's where he's interesting.

What do you think an education in cultural studies and popular culture has to offer intellectuals, scholars, and individuals today?

The fact that it actually still exists at all is the most amazing thing. Especially when you get — and I think Australia will get it too — something like the Research Assessment Exercise [RAE] idea where people's research is monitored and graded and then you get rid of departments of whatever sorts that are supposedly not good enough. Birmingham's Cultural Studies Centre no longer exists because the RAE in Britain gave it a 3 in the last Exercise which was 2001 and Birmingham University closed it to howls of horror. I think the fact that something called cultural studies certainly in terms of journals and academic departments exists at all is absolutely amazing given this thirty- or forty-year history. One of the effects of the RAE is that the more traditional disciplines get reinforced. Interdisciplinarity is a real problem and I think that's what was interesting in the first place about Richard Hoggart's Centre for Cultural Studies at Birmingham. It came out of an English department, but it rapidly became interdisciplinary and suddenly sociologists, historians, people from sport, and so on came in. That was what I was really interested in when I first started. To have interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity which cultural studies preserves is great.

I think, though, that we are in a much more pragmatic period of higher education where ideas and theoretical traditions that we have been talking about are really under attack and pragmatism and the business of getting people jobs is more important than it's ever been. I never think that you can get rid of that anyway. Students themselves are going to come to universities for cultural studies as much as business studies for jobs and there's nothing wrong with that on one level. But to pretend that cultural studies departments, for example, can simply be about churning out good employees with transferable skills is nonsense. I think the pressure is to relabel your department creative industries, for example — ECU [Edith Cowan University] is a university in Perth that has done that — without really realising what the effect of that is. But creative industries departments around the world — and QUT [Queensland University of Technology] is a good example — are proclaiming that they are rewriting the history of cultural studies and humanities and social sciences and they are saying basically, come to these departments and we'll get you a job. I'm not saying that's not important — I think it is — but some part of the project is being lost there. So I think the question is a very important one. I think I'm going to leave it hanging in the air in some ways. If it loses its original project and only ends up being like a business studies department then we might as well all go home. That's the dilemma: we've got now more than ever before, whether you're going to teach people for its own sake, teach ideas for its own sake, or create good employees with transferable skills. It's a real dilemma I think.