

POST-FUTURE PERTH
Mobile City Cultures in the Indian Ocean Cityscape

By Steve Redhead



Professor of Sport and Media Cultures at the University of Brighton in the UK, Steve Redhead is Head of the Research Student Division in the Chelsea School where he directs research into Mobile Accelerated Nonpostmodern Culture (MANC). He was educated at the Universities of Manchester and Warwick. For many years he was Professor of Law and Popular Culture at Manchester Metropolitan University where he created and co-directed the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture (MIPC). He has been Visiting European Professor at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada and Visiting Professor in Communications and Cultural Studies at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia, where he was also seconded

to work on mobile city cultures and creative industries for the Premier of Western Australia. He chaired the Premier's Creative Industries Policy Taskforce in the State Government in Perth in 2004. He is the author, or editor, of fourteen books, including *The Jean Baudrillard Reader* (Edinburgh University Press and Columbia University Press European perspectives Series, 2008), *Paul Virilio: Theorist for an Accelerated Culture* (Edinburgh University Press and University of Toronto Press, 2004) and *The Paul Virilio Reader* (Edinburgh University Press and Columbia University Press European Perspectives Series, 2004). He is editor of Berg's *Subcultural Style* book series.

A conference in July 2009, LandCorp's C2030 Summit in Perth, Western Australia, looked at the future of the cityscape in the 21st century, right on the Indian Ocean. FuturePerth, an urban planning think tank in the so-called City of Lights, proposed a 'light rail network, moving people in a sustainable manner, an important element in creating liveable, vibrant cities'. A former director of the Art Gallery of WA called for Perth to 'develop the north and south banks of the River Swan foreshore into art and entertainment precincts', create 'massive interactive artworks' and become 'the cultural centre of the Indian Ocean rim'. Others argued more specifically for making Perth 'the biggest university city on the Indian Ocean rim'. For Professor Richard Weller from the School of Architecture at the University of Western Australia the city, which could 'in the next 40 years rise to a population of 4.2 million' from a million and a quarter today, needed to 'look around the world at other thriving cities, decide what type of metropolis it wanted to be and follow a design to make it happen'. WA sculptor Ben Juniper even futuristically envisaged 'Perth becoming an electric city powered by the sun. All the central business district roads would be removed and replaced by textured photo-voltaic cells in an interlocking jigsaw type format, enabling it to become the first city in the world to be entirely powered by renewable

energy technologies. The amount of power this electric city could generate could easily drive an elevated, dual use, cycle-sky bridge network high above the city's streets'.



Or is this the cityscape of Futurism? Maybe, but, a century on from Marinetti and the Futurists, things are different: we are post-Futurist now. Dream City projects like 'Future Perth' incorporate the future already present. As cyber punk writer William Gibson has put it - the future is already here, it is just that it is unevenly distributed. We are all 'post-future' now.



Five years earlier, in June, 2004, an issue of *Australian Vogue* proclaimed, via a cover adorned with a glamorous fashion shot of Australian idol Nicole Kidman, the tantalising possibility of ‘Perth becoming the new Paris’. Could this be the same Perth that media all over Australia have at various times labelled ‘Wait Awhile’ (WA) and ‘Dullsville’? The answer to this question is ‘yes’ and the reason for the considerable media interest in the city of Perth and the state of WA lies in the burgeoning of the so-called ‘creative industries’ of Western Australia. *Vogue* located what it called ‘Perth’s current creative boom’ in several creative industries ‘hotspots’ – popular music, fashion, design, contemporary art, photography and architecture, but it could easily have

added others – film and video games for instance. *Vogue* singled out model Gemma Ward, designer Richard Nicoll, artist Deanne Cheuk and musicians The Sleepy Jackson as the Class of 2004 but any number of substitutes could have been used, itself a tribute to the strength in depth



of Perth's creatives over the last few years. The 2008 'rockumentary' *Something In The Water*, now out on DVD (accompanied by a double CD soundtrack) brilliantly captures the 'isolated Perth music scene at a stage when it took centre stage and rocked a nation'. But as the SITW team proclaim 'the Western Australian music scene has been unusually vibrant over the last few years but it has been turning out great songs for decades'. From The Triffids and their anthemic 'Wide Open Road'

through The Scientists, The Stems, Hoodoo Gurus, Jebediah and the John Butler Trio to cutting edge contemporary bands like Little Birdy, Eskimo Joe, End of Fashion, Schvendes, The Waifs, Fourth Floor Collapse, The Panics, Sex Panther, Yummy Fur, Bob Evans, Institut Polaire, The Silents and many many more who could possibly disagree? The future's here, the post- future's Perth.

Acknowledgment

All photos by Tara Brabazon, Professor of Media, University of Brighton

Further Media

Brabazon, Tara (ed) (2005) *Liverpool of the South Seas: Perth and Its Popular Music*. Perth: University of Western Australia Press.

Something In The Water (DVD and 2xCD)

www.somethinginthewater.com