



<http://www.ucalgary.ca/hic> • ISSN 1492-7810  
2014-16 • Vol. 11, No. 1

## The Redhead Review Part 2: Theoretical Times

Leanne McRae

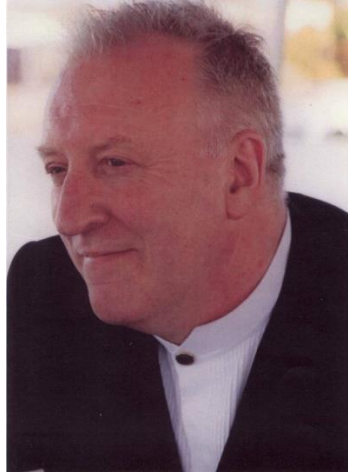
Steve Redhead passed away on 8 March 2018. The following is written by Dr. Tara Brabazon, Dean of Graduate Research and Professor of Cultural Studies, Flinders University, Bedford Park, South Australia.

*Professor Steve Redhead was born in Shifnal in the United Kingdom in 1952 and died in Adelaide, Australia, in March 2018. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in the last week of July 2017. Steve and I decided to keep his illness private to enable Theoretical Times, his book published with Emerald in November 2017, to gain an honest scholarly audience, rather than a gothically fixated one. Through his career, he published 17 books and hundreds of refereed articles. Two more books will be published posthumously.*

*The passionate sorrow that greeted his death, both online and offline, demonstrates his scholarly influence in philosophy, cultural studies, socio-legal studies, criminology, leisure studies, and football studies.*

*Dr. Leanne McRae was — and is — a precious friend to us both. She was my PhD student at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia, and Steve's "best man" at our wedding. Few people knew him as well, and as deeply, as Leanne.*

*I thank Leanne for conducting this interview and our colleagues at the History of Intellectual Culture for publishing it. May we continue to live in Theoretical Times, and may we use those theories to increase our intellectual generosity to scholars around the world.*



\* \* \*

**Leanne McRae: It's been 10 years since we talked about the "Redhead Review." We did it in 2005 and it was published in 2006. So I thought it was time for us to have a think about how things have changed since then. Our jumping-off point last time involved talking about your early career and we discussed the emergence of Virilio because you were just about to release the two books on Virilio — the *Reader and Theorist for an Accelerated Culture*. Can you talk about that experience about how Virilio changed things for you, what happened after, and how you think it was received?**

Steve Redhead: Yes — that's a great question and it was fundamental to what I was doing then. Ten years on I'm not sure that is any more, to be honest. What I was trying to do was try to find some kind of reorientation of my work I think partly because it was when I had migrated to Australia and when I was writing certainly, *Virilio: Theorist for an Accelerated Culture*<sup>1</sup> and the *Reader*<sup>2</sup> as well because a lot of my introductions were new to the pieces we were extracting from Virilio, I kind of seized on his work. I had thought about his work before, but I suddenly seized on him in this obsessive fashion because I thought that his work would actually help me develop theories around what I call accelerated culture at the time, and what I still call accelerated culture and I've moved off into other concepts like claustropolitanism,<sup>3</sup> and Virilio was responsible for the idea of claustropolitanism because he talked about claustropolis.<sup>4</sup> So I think a lot at the time I was trying to jump off his work into my own ideas. At that time I really hadn't been able to do a lot of that. I was kind of really working with his texts — which I still think are interesting — but they . . . because his background in French phenomenology limits him, I think, and also his kind of anarchistic Christianity. I think there are limits to the use of his work, although I still carried on using him for quite a long time. And I think people should read his work but I think there's a limit and that French Phenomenology and other aspects of his, if you like, personality and biography, do limit the use of his work and I don't think people like John Armitage<sup>5</sup> who have used his work in a postmodern way — I think

<sup>1</sup> Steve Redhead, *Paul Virilio: Theorist for an Accelerated Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Steve Redhead, *The Paul Virilio Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Steve Redhead, "What Is Claustropolitanism?" *steveredhead.com* (blog), 14 December 2015, <http://www.steveredhead.zone/theoretical-times/what-is-claustropolitanism/>.

<sup>4</sup> Steve Redhead, *We Have Never Been Postmodern: Theory at the Speed of Light* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> John Armitage, "Beyond Postmodernism? Paul Virilio's Hypermodern Cultural Theory," *Ctheory.net*, 15 November 2000, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=133>.

that's the wrong direction. I don't think that helps. So eventually, I suppose I got less and less enamoured with Virilio. Although I still think Virilio is an interesting figure. But then I got to a point where I suppose the theorists that really started to energize me were people like Baudrillard who was very much a sidekick of Virilio, and I found him more productive. So I did write a Reader on Baudrillard<sup>6</sup> and the introductions to that were really my efforts at trying to reinterpret him. And that was a success. But I have carried on with my work on him and moving into theorists like Badiou and Slavoj Žižek who I've tried to kind of resurrect from the pyre I put him on at one point. But Badiou is a good example — both of those theorists Badiou and Žižek I think are more useful in what I am trying to do than Virilio. I was asked by the *International Journal of Žižek Studies* to submit a paper which I'll do on a special issue on Baudrillard and Žižek, which comes out later this year [2015].<sup>7</sup> So I think that suggests that I was right to move into those kinds of theorists and their relationship. So I think that although Virilio was important for a while for me he became less important in these ten years.

**So — he kind of created a bridge didn't he — from what you had done previously to what you were hoping to move into.**

Absolutely. He was a help. But I think the other theorists I mentioned; Baudrillard, Žižek, and Badiou *now* I think are much more influential in what I am trying to do.

**I want to try and connect that stuff because you still write about football hooligans and you are still interested in audience studies and fandom in that respect and deviance in particular. You also write of the hit-and-tell genre. How has that type of writing changed over time for you?**

I think you are absolutely right. In some ways I never left the law, criminology, and deviance background that I had as a student and in fact I am a Professor of Jurisprudence now. A lot of the work that I've done particularly in the football area, I have a new book on that coming out in August [2015] *This Modern Sporting Life* with Routledge<sup>8</sup> and that really does kind of go back over the hit-and-tell genre which is my word for basically football hooligan memoirs. Hit-and-tell even as a phrase has actually entered the culture which I am amazed about. But, I have always been interested in radical criminology. I think I have always seen myself as part of that tradition and perhaps that's been the most important influence on me. So the law and criminology background spawned the work on popular culture and deviance, and even fandom. My work came out of a law and criminology background rather than a media studies or cultural studies background. Cultural studies for me was extremely important, but as part of a tradition of work in law and criminology — so the CCCS Working Papers in Cultural Studies, basically, *Resistance Through Rituals*<sup>9</sup> which is the fifth of the Working Papers in Cultural Studies which became a very influential book, was the thing that I was interested in. That was about subcultures — about deviance. Also *Policing the Crisis*<sup>10</sup> which also came out years later. I think that sort of work — that bit of Cultural Studies — was what I was interested in. Rather than say, audience studies or fandom. I came to those later but I originally came to them through law and criminology. The football hooliganism stuff which now spans decades basically — the hit-and-tell studies

<sup>6</sup> Steve Redhead, *The Jean Baudrillard Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Steve Redhead, "Theoretical Times: Realigning Baudrillard and Žižek," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 10, no. 1 (2016), <http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/90/87>.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Redhead, *Football and Accelerated Culture: This Modern Sporting Life* (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (London: Hutchison, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978), <https://colectivociajpp.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/stuart-hall-etc-policing-the-crisis-mugging-the-state-and-law-and-order-critical-social-studies-1978.pdf>.

itself spans decades<sup>11</sup> — was important because it drew a line from law and criminology through lots of different disciplines; Cultural Studies, Socio-legal Studies, what I would now call Physical Cultural Studies — but the actual project is still interesting, the archive project around football hooligan memoirs. There are 108 of them now in the archive and we interviewed a lot of people who were authors and publishers, and in many ways it's a great criminology project, you know a lot of these people are beyond the pale because they often went to jail. They often expressed views even in their fandom which were pretty much an anathema to progressive academics. I think there are some interesting aspects of the politics of football hooligans but I think the idea that at one time which was abroad which was these kind of gangs formed some sort of resistance is nonsense. I think they're interesting for their kind of embeddedness in a declining working-class culture and a crazy, greedy football culture.

***What I am interested in also is obviously the theme of deviance has flowed so strongly through all of your work and the MIPC [Manchester Institute for Popular Culture] in particular really allowed space for different renderings of youth and subculture to circulate — my suspicion is that constructions of deviance haven't changed very much — what's your feeling about that over the decades you've been studying deviance?***

Yes — I think you're right. What's happened is that the disciplines and the theoretical positions around deviance have changed but actually, a lot of the debates were correct at the time. So the work on the State and the work on law, which a lot of those deviance studies spawned was absolutely right. I think what has happened since, particularly in criminology, is that you've got a division between what has become neo-liberal criminology — which is very much a right wing position on crime and deviance and all that entails — and then what I would call a kind of liberal, postmodern criminology. The Teesside Centre for Realist Criminology<sup>12</sup> in England — I'm on the advisory board — what they would call liberal postmodern criminology. They very much attack that ground and I think they're right to do so. I think that was a real mistake within criminology — it kind of took off in a particular direction of moral relativism which we definitely didn't need. They developed this idea of ultra-realist criminology — Steve Hall and Simon Winlow<sup>13</sup> — they're really great writers in my view. My work has kind of dovetailed with theirs and in their latest book on ultra-realist criminology they've used some of my ideas on accelerated culture, claustropolitanism, and so on. I think you are absolutely right that the issues actually around law, crime, and deviance which were really current within cultural studies and sociology in the late 70s haven't actually changed very much. I think what happened was that one strand went off in a ludicrous right-wing direction — what I call neo-liberal criminology now — and equally ludicrous there was a postmodern criminology or liberal criminology. Both of those directions were wrong in my view. And I think we've now come to a crossroads where we need to move on.

***You've already done a lot of this thinking through of big ideas via the Theoretical Times podcast. How do those ideas bring together your work in popular culture and high theory?***

It's a great question. I ask myself that every day. How do I tie these things together? I suppose I have always been interested in that breakdown of high and low culture and how we explain that breakdown — whether we use low theory to explain it or we use high theory. And I got caught in that a lot of the time because the

<sup>11</sup> Steve Redhead, "Hit and Tell: A Review Essay on the Soccer Hooligan Memoir," *Soccer and Society*, 5, no. 3 (2004), 392–403, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1466097042000279625>.

<sup>12</sup> Teesside Centre for Realist Criminology, [http://www.tees.ac.uk/sections/Research/social\\_futures/criminological.cfm](http://www.tees.ac.uk/sections/Research/social_futures/criminological.cfm).

<sup>13</sup> Steve Hall and Simon Winlow, *Revitalizing Criminological Theory: Towards a New Ultra-realism* (London: Routledge, 2015).

high theorists didn't think I was high enough and the low theorists thought I was too high. I'm still in that binary. But I think I have always been interested in following the lead of theorists. For example I still go back to, as I do in *Theoretical Times*, someone like Althusser who was very, very influential on me in the 1970s when I first read his work, and someone like Lucio Colletti — an Italian philosopher who is less well known than Althusser now, but actually was a giant at the time until he went to the right with Berlusconi's right-wing party. But Althusser certainly is a great example of someone quite clever who we should go back to. We shouldn't throw babies out with the bathwater. The trouble is we don't know which the babies are. But I think they're a great example. They were very influential on the *Theoretical Times* project<sup>14</sup> and my work on developing concepts has basically been influenced by those people for four decades. So I have constantly gone back to them even though you can criticize them.

So I think what happened with my work when I was trying to reach for new concepts — because I did go back to Althusser and Colletti — but I also then moved forward for a while with Virilio and to some extent Baudrillard and then I came to, in later times, theorists who I would really hold onto — Baudrillard, Badiou, Žižek, for example. Who I do think forge a new perspective and they have allowed me to develop these new concepts which form the *Theoretical Times*. The thing about *Theoretical Times* is that I am arguing that there is an audience for high theory, difficult work, which these people provided and I suppose I am inspired by that. But — and I am constantly conscious of this — that we need to be able to apply these theories, these concepts which I'm trying to work with, to, for example, watching *Breaking Bad* on TV. At Charles Sturt University there's a great course in the School of Communication and Creative Industries which was on *Breaking Bad* and Baudrillard. It was fantastic, innovative work — who would've thought, who knew? The interesting thing is some of the staff, for example, talked to me about the *Theoretical Times* stuff — and it fits. So I think there is a real need now to operationalize what I have been doing. The *Theoretical Times* project looks at why I chose these pairs of theorists: Colletti/Althusser, Virilio/Baudrillard, Badiou/Žižek and says "actually lots of people are interested in these people," there are international journals — open-access journals which everybody reads, and publishers like Verso sell huge numbers of these books. There is a real audience out there for these people. The podcasts themselves were downloaded tens and tens of thousands of times around the world — which is astonishing to me. Why would anybody do that? But they did.

I also think people then say "yeah, OK, I am interested in these things, but how does that help us?" One of the things Tara [Brabazon] and I talk about in *Theoretical Times* was that you could apply some of these concepts — and we'd been just casually watching things like *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*, and some of them fitted better than others. But that idea that I was trying to forge which was particularly what I call claustropolitanism, which is like, the structure of feeling, (which Raymond Williams invented), of the old world disintegrating. We all feel like we have to get off the planet. What I was trying to get at was a kind of cultural condition. And the funny thing is that since the post-crash we've now got texts, you know; films, TV series, popular music, and so on which actually fit that. They capture this cultural condition which I think is global — it's just that we haven't all picked up on it. But I do think I'm onto something. Because that structure of feeling right across disciplines is something that people find difficult to explain. We used to think cosmopolitan sociology — you know — people like Ulrich Beck or Anthony Giddens — that they were explaining things in a satisfactory way. Then comes the global financial crisis and you're wiping away a whole set of disciplines. I really do think that's what's happened. So *Theoretical Times* is important for that and I'm kind of stumbling along in this structure of feeling at the end of the old world. Somehow. To try and kind of make sense of what it feels like to be in this post-crash world. And I do think there is something

---

<sup>14</sup> Steve Redhead, Writing in Theoretical Times, (vodcast) YouTube, 8 January 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK9UolZUQ9I>.

there and we need theoretical resources like we've never needed them before and of course they're not there.

***In the UK you were a Professor of Accelerated Culture and now you are in Australia you are back to being a Professor of Sport Media which is a slightly more conventional title for what you do. So I just want to get your thoughts firstly on the mobility — you've moved around quite a bit in the last few years particularly — and not to paint the UK as more progressive than what is happening in Australia, but that there is space for you to be a Professor of Accelerated Culture in one context and that perhaps that does not exist in another context and how you feel about that shift.***

I think it is interesting. I think my attempt to smash all disciplines down which has been a 40-year-long career has got me into a lot of trouble really. But I always felt that disciplines were there to be smashed down. The trouble is, of course, particularly in conservative times, we retrench around disciplines. It is quite interesting with my Law and Criminology background meant that I was first a Professor of Law and Popular Culture — and that was the first in the world. But that area is now more routinely talked about as entertainment and sports law and I am on the editorial board of a journal in that area. I was a Professor in Inter-disciplinary Legal Studies when I was in Canada. So usually I have been a Professor in Law or Socio-cultural Legal Studies or as I am just or very recently at CSU Professor of Jurisprudence which is legal philosophy. But where there haven't been law schools I've usually had a different kind of chair. So Professor of Sports Media Studies at Brighton and at Charles Sturt University when I first came, was the conventional way in which my work was labelled. But it is interesting, you're absolutely right, I was able to be a Visiting Professor of Accelerated Culture when I was at the University of Bolton and they said "What do you want your professorship to be in?" They were generous enough to say "This is what you can be" and I thought that fitted. I thought that was wonderful. But I actually think we are retrenching again, particularly in the global financial crisis period. As the disciplines fail to explain things we retrench around the disciplines. So in Economics for example, at Manchester University where I first studied there was a Post-Crash Economic Student Society,<sup>15</sup> which still exists, and they set it up because they were so dissatisfied with the economics they were being taught in the wake to the global financial crisis. So that is a great example, even though the courses are as traditional as they've ever been. You've got that, I think, right across the world. You've got a retrenchment and even a kind of extinguishing of more interesting disciplines — Cultural Studies is a great example, where is Cultural Studies now? Particularly in Australia I notice how everything is more scientific than ever before — even when I first moved to Australia 14 years ago. There is an anti-Humanities anti-intellectualism in the air in Australia. Partly because 'science' in inverted commas which is basically positivism and behaviouralism not interested in chaos theory or complexity theory is actually very dominant in all universities. Science is what people do when they research in my view. I was the Head of School of Human Movement Studies when I first came here at Charles Sturt University and Sociology of Sport of what I would now call Physical Cultural Studies was part of that and yet, was invisible because School of Human Movement Studies meant exercise science — science being the optimum here. That's the challenge for Humanities scholars in Australia now. I think it has gotten worse and worse and worse. The ARC [Australia Research Council] is dominated by that. Universities discourse is dominated by that. So I think in lots of ways Australian higher education is actually a better, much better environment than say, the UK which I think is a basket case, actually, because they have neo-liberalized it out of existence. There's a great danger in that. Australia should not do that. But I think this anti-Humanities anti-intellectualism which is perceived in Australian universities now is something we have to fight against. Otherwise we give up and go home.

---

<sup>15</sup> University of Manchester, Post-Crash Economics Society, <http://www.post-crasheconomics.com/>.

***But it seems there is a little bit of space opening up now — because I think that is a really interesting assessment — and I've felt that for a while here — but there's also been a really interesting shift as you say post-financial crisis with science now being under attack as well. We've just sacked a whole bunch of CSIRO [Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation] scientists . . .***

Yes — and they would never have been, in the past. It's an odd thing.

***Perhaps we are at a crucial point where there is space for Humanities scholars to be intervening.***

Yes. And it is interesting, as you say, the scientific discourse has almost eclipsed Humanities research — or — funding for Humanities research, but actually it's an attack on all academics. The anti-intellectualism which I think started from the scientific discourse actually is hitting the scientists too. That's why we should reconfigure Australian higher education. It's a really important time. Don't let the neo-liberal university take over. We've learnt a lot about when you marketize things out of existence and we've — Tara and I — have seen the future and it doesn't look good. Australian higher education has got a chance to move at the crossroads in a better direction and they'll have to do it really strongly.

***So to continue with this neo-liberal theme speaking of what I perceive as a kind of neo-liberal new discipline that has emerged within the last few years; the creative industries which you've also been heavily involved with. My suspicion is that creative industries is kind of over and I don't know if that is necessarily a bad thing. But it obviously has some significant consequences for some universities around the world that have created Creative Industries departments, faculties, and so on. Do you think the creative industries is over and what are the consequences of that? What did the creative industries do well and what did it not do well?***

I think you're absolutely right. It's at a critical juncture. I was part of the School of Communication and Creative Industries at Charles Sturt University last year. We're sitting literally 100 yards from that location as we speak. They changed. They are a great example of a department that came together as that but were communications and something else a few years ago. But of course creative industries was the flavour of the year and they got labelled in that way. I think in particular my colleague at the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, Justin O'Connor, who's now a professor at Monash, his argument is that there is life after creative industries but by implication he's also burying it. I think his argument would be that we go back to cultural industries which is an earlier historical example of this, and that creative industries in some ways was a kind of wrong road, although he was part of that as well. And certainly ten years ago before we did the review — I was Chair of the Creative Industries Taskforce for Geoff Gallop who was Premier of Western Australia at the time — and I was trying to say to people in policy terms “look just because you can mine anything in this State — Western Australia — you do have to develop a knowledge economy and here's a creative industries policy which will help you do that,” even though there are lots of problems. And I had done it in the UK with Chris Smith and Tony Banks who was Minister for Sport in the first Blair government, again with reservations. But in some ways then, you could be more optimistic pre-global financial crash. You could be more optimistic about how the creative industries could be an intervention and I think you are right in that people lost faith in that intervention. I could see it when I was doing that work for Gallop — who I think was a bright bloke and really quite progressive at the time. People were saying “look actually we'd rather just do mining.” And the interesting thing is if you go to Western Australia now you can feel the end of the FIFO [Fly In, Fly Out] thing and it looks a bit tawdry really. The boom, the mining boom may not come back and I may be talking out of turn here but I think there is a real problem which was the one I perceived at the time 10 years ago. It needed a knowledge economy using aspects of the creative industries in the mining industry, for example, and people didn't do it. So Western Australia's economy is coming to a crisis and I know it sounds daft. It looks a fantastic place to live. But

that kind of claustropolitanism is a very good example of what I am talking about. Of course when you say these things people say you're an absolute lunatic. But I did say them ten years ago to Gallop.

***I think you're absolutely right about what's happening. There has been a failure to put in place — and creative industries was a way, a mechanism, a language to put in place different ways of thinking around economics and perhaps the major problems with it was that we didn't have a more rigorous language about the economy.***

Yes. I think so. That's a good way of putting it.

***In your early days you wrote quite a bit about popular music. You don't seem to write tremendously about music anymore. Obviously you have bigger ideas filtering. But I want to ask you first why you are choosing to no longer write about popular music and secondly, if you feel that there is a space for these bigger ideas to filter through a reinscription of how we understand popular music and popular music theory.***

It's a great question. Umm . . . I think as I got older . . . I definitely always thought of popular music as youth music (maybe that's wrong thinking) and as I got older I thought "nobody is going to want to hear me write about youth music" and I do think that is a problem because I had always argued you have to have ethnographic work and that's what the Manchester Institute for Popular Cultural Studies was. All my PhD students were doing ethnographies. People like Gonnie [Hillegonda] Rietveld. You know they were part of bands, Quango, and they were part of the Hacienda and so on. They were writing about music from within and I think those ethnographic methods are much more difficult to employ as you get older. So that's part of it. But also I think popular music and popular culture changed. One of the things that is pointed out in Britain for example at the moment is how popular culture and in particular popular music has become less working-class-based, and that was what I was interested in. I was interested in the working-class drive behind popular culture — the excluded suddenly finding this arena of struggle and in some ways that was what I was particularly interested in. I liked the music and I liked the aspects of post-subcultures that I was talking about. I was a fan but I also think the most important thing politically was that there was something going on there where working-class culture which had been excluded everywhere else exploded in popular culture. The opposite is happening now in Britain and there's been a lot of work on this, where say Mumford and Sons, they are the sons of bankers and they're public school boys, which at an individual level doesn't matter but actually *sociologically* working-class culture is being excluded from popular culture and there's quite a lot to say about that I think. I think that's less true in a country like Australia, but where popular culture and what we would call popular cultural studies is going in direction where popular music studies is really interesting. People that are interested in it should do it. But where it was more cutting edge I think in the past is that it had that clash of working class and other cultures and I think that's been lost. So I guess I am less interested in writing about it because of that.

***So you moved to Australia because you married an Australian woman who is pretty much a force of nature who makes us all feel bad about our level of productivity . . .***

Even me.

***I am interested in how you feel that relationship has changed or influenced the way you work and the kind of work that you do?***

Yes — she is a phenomenon and I am very lucky. Because she has such incredible drive and just never lets up in her own work but also you are *shamed* if you're not working . . .



---

***You're not awake at 3:00 a.m. writing . . .***

No I can't do that. But I can definitely feel guilty the rest of the day that I'm not doing cutting-edge work. In marriage that's a really important thing. I really have been shamed into it. Because I had a life and I had pretty good publishing career when we met and I thought "Oh well where am I going?" and in fact definitely I had writer's block and all sorts of things about the time that I moved to Australia and I thought this is new way of looking at things. Perth is a great city and Murdoch University was great. I really got inspired and I think some of my work was different and better because of that and a lot of that was because of our marriage. It was one of really reading thousands of books and an intellectual partnership. Not necessarily that we wrote together very much although we have done but actually it was an inspiration. So she inspires other people and she definitely inspires me and shamed me into it. Getting up every day and working. And I really feel that I've kind of had a second life because of that and I definitely feel that my work is better because of that too. I'm pretty self-critical but I am pleased with some of the stuff I've done.