

## The Music Folder #5: Simon Reynolds

Interview by Francesco Tenaglia, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

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**FRANCESCO TENAGLIA: Let's talk about *Get Back* (2021) an enormously successful documentary series about The Beatles recording *Let it Be* (1970). It is based on unseen footage that was supposed to be used for a previous documentary. It puts together a lot of elements you researched or are part of your interests: pop culture, "rear view" approach to cultural phenomena you analyzed in *Retromania* (2010), among other things. I imagine you've seen it?**

SIMON REYNOLDS: Oh yeah, I've watched the whole thing. Initially, I felt like 'this is a bit boring and depressing', because the Beatles are not getting on with each other. And they're in a rather depressing and gloomy rehearsal space. But then suddenly you get caught up in it. They move to a different studio, Billy Preston arrives and the vibe changes. Then Linda McCartney turns up with her daughter and it just suddenly becomes a much happier session. I was intrigued from the start simply because as someone who's written about retro culture, the fact that it's like a nostalgia-generative public event that itself was based on a project that was for the Beatles a form of nostalgia. "Get Back" - they were trying to get back to their early feeling they had as a band when they didn't really use the recording studio, they played live in the studio. 'Get Back', the project, was an attempt to rebuild that group feeling they had then, the gang of friends even before they were famous. In Hamburg and even before that, when they were a skiffle group, The Quarrymen.

One of the songs they return to in the Get Back session was one of the very first songs, "One After 909" – some people think it was written as early as 1957. And they continually play these old, early rock and roll songs by other people that they loved - they're messing around, almost like trying to keep their musical limbs fit, get back in shape by riffing on these old rock n roll songs, old R&B and blues songs. Paul McCartney came up with the idea for Get Back as a way to save the group from splitting up really. It was disintegrating. So he is trying to engineer a situation where that feeling comes back – "get back to where you once belonged", like the song goes. The excitement of a group starting out. But they're older and wiser, and they got married and had children, or children are around.

So they're all transitioning, leaving behind this boy-gang adolescent mindset but still trying to hang on to it, or bring it back. Nostalgia is integral to the project and then we the viewers experience this second layer of nostalgia. For me as a British person born in 1963 and who grew up in London until I was about four or five, then we moved about 40 kilometers outside the city but we would come back to London regularly. So for me, it was like time travel. I was like entranced by the full-colour images of London exactly how I remember it. Linda McCartney looks like what mothers looked like then - women usually had children much younger, so a mother was typically a woman in her mid-twenties, you know. She looks like this radiant, lovely young mother with a daughter who would be the roughly same age as I was in 1969 - Heather, her daughter, looks like she's six, this delightful creature.

But I also recognized the look of the clothes, whether it's hip people like the Beatles with their brightly colored clothes or regular people in the streets, ordinary people. Some of the people in that studio are dressed quite squarely – the junior engineer Alan Parsons has a very smart jacket and suit on. George Martin looks like a 1950s British film idol - very smart looking. But just people's faces, the toast they were eating, the tea they were drinking. The kind of mugs they drank it out of. even. It was like being transported back to the past in this incredibly vivid way. For people my age, who grew up in Britain, there's this feeling of time travel. But it's probably the same for younger people who know the Beatles just through the records and photographs and films.

So it's an extraordinary experience and it also raises a lot of issues. On the one hand it's weird that we're still talking about the Beatles- the Beatles are still the biggest thing ever in pop music, and as a result this documentary can be one of the biggest popular culture events of the year, even though it's from a long time ago. So that's weird. What does it feel like to you? Did you watch it?

**FT: Oh well, you know I'm not a huge fan... I'm ok with the Beatles, I like the Beatles, I watched chunks of the thing as an incredibly huge pop phenomenon constructed with—somehow—explorative, exciting values, it's very vital and not twee and sentimental.**

SR: You wouldn't spend eight hours.

**FT: Yeah, yes, exactly. I thought that the reactions were very interesting because I think Peter Jackson also wanted to address some philological issues, you know, Yoko, Ono, the relationship between Paul and John. So, it feels there's some kind of agenda.**

SR: There's a revisionist thing going on. Because actually Yoko wasn't disruptive like the previous accounts and the original film of the sessions makes out. The other version of this story was Paul as the bossy guy who was ordering everyone around and they were resisting him like sulky teenagers. But this longer film shows you something else - it gives you this feeling of a guy desperately trying to keep the band together and trying to be almost like the father of the group. Or the good older brother. And you see he's very nervous, he's like biting his nails at certain points when there's all this tension and it's very, very moving. And the presence of Linda and Yoko is very touching, the way they're just sort of there.

It's extraordinary. The sheer duration of it is unique. And this is a condensed version out of hundreds of hours of footage and it comes out at eight hours. It's very unique in documentaries because it has that sense of lived time. Even though it has been very cleverly edited and also restored to make it look even more vivid, the colours seem so vivid. That brings back for me this feeling of how the world looks when you're a child, everything's very bright and that's how I remember the past. But there's a real sense of duration and mundanity in these long interactions and pauses, where nothing much is happening and it goes on and on. A lot of times it seems very trivial what's being captured. But these are things you do not see normally in documentaries, the inconsequential moments.

It feels like an extraordinary capture of the past, of this lived breathing thing, a real feel of time that you don't usually get in docs. Most documentaries are quite chopped together. Certainly most fictional films try to make the past insanely exciting. If you think of the biopic *Rocketman* on Elton John, it's a very exciting movie, it chops around. I'm not even a big fan of Elton John and I've found it very entertaining. There's no pauses and they never show the creative process. Like, if you see a film like the Queen film, there's this sort of tiny gesture towards how they came up with *Bohemian Rhapsody* but it's compressed into a minute, which barely captures the sheer labor and craft of making it. But in the Elton John film, you don't see any sense of him as a musician struggling to write something, it just comes out like it's a natural force. In the Beatles *Get Back*, what's amazing is that you see these songs gradually evolve. One of them is playing a song they are in the process of writing and the others have no idea that a great classic song is being written. They're just doing something else - drinking their tea, smoking, Ringo is filling in on the drum kit in a fairly desultory way. Meanwhile, George Harrison is stumbling towards "Something" - which Frank Sinatra would describe as one of the greatest love songs of the 20th century. But the Beatles aren't even paying attention to this genius emerging. Or the same with the gradual emergence of the song *Get back* out of jamming. It's a unique glimpse into what the reality of being a working band is, which is a lot of messing around, a lot of jamming, a lot of "What do we have to do here? How do we make a bridge that gets us to this next bit?" or "What kind of beat would go well with this?"

So it creates a very poignant and powerful sense of reality, which is very addictive. Like, at the end of it I was feeling “I could watch more of this”. At the same time, the Retromania writer in me is wondering ‘why am I devoting so much time to these events of the past?. Why are we still stuck with the Beatles?’. The Beatles remain still the greatest adventure that ever happened in pop music. So it’s a kind of conflicted feeling I have about Get Back. On the one hand, I feel I should be against this kind of thing. On the other hand I was addicted to it. Mesmerized by it.

**FT: From what I saw, I thought it was not a museum-like attempt at putting things together and to make a historically correct rendering of the facts. I think the footage archive was used with some propulsive creative energy, I felt there is an energy infused in trying to imagine some new form of story-telling format.**

SR: Museum exhibitions create this sense of biographical and artistic inevitability – like things could only have gone like this, they were destined for greatness from the start. They also show you all the influences and sources and things they stole. And that detracts from the reality of how people experience pop music when it actually happens - you don’t know what inspired it, you don’t know what it’s referring to, and it just hits you as this thing out of nowhere. There’s a real problem with this culture of annotation, all the footnotes, the Wiki information and the blogs. A good example with Bowie is the song *Station to Station*. For people at the time, the lyrics would’ve been incomprehensible - they are full of references to magical texts. Today you can look all that up and so when you experience *Station to Station* you can see what every line refers to, like this Kabbalistic text, or Aleister Crowley. But in 1976 it would have just been this eerie song with mystifying lyrics and a strange mood. All this historicization, museumization, annotation and contextualizing of music takes away some dimension from it. Yet, somehow, despite it all, if it’s really good music it still survives. You can know everything about the circumstances of the making of the song *Fame*, like how John Lennon came into the studio and contributed to it. But if you hear the song it’s still so powerful, it really hits you. Generally speaking, though, there’s too much contextualizing and too much information surrounding pop music.

**FT: I was surprised that *Get Back* didn’t diminish any of the Beatles’ auratic strength for the public. People on social media platform used categories as “genius”, the same old romantic criteria to define the band. Stuff that groups which are born within the complete transparency of the internet don’t have. Speaking of which I’d like to ask you, in which way do you think the internet changed the role of music writing?**

SR: Actually having said there’s too much history and context, that is one of the things people actually want. Which is lucky for someone like me because I can provide that role as a journalist. A lot of the writing that I do is actually about the past. I don’t particularly see a contradiction there with having written a book called *Retromania*, because the things I’m writing about historically were new in their original moment. I’m not writing about things today that are recreating Sixties garage punk. Not often anyway, unless there’s an artist that does it in a very interesting way, like some of the hauntology people did. But if I write about Chic and explain where they came from and what their influences were, their impact in the time, I’m talking about what was a living culture, what was a new thing and a new sound that was hugely influential and shaped the sound of pop in the Eighties. Last year, I wrote a piece about Chic for the music streamer Tidal and those kind of pieces are ones people seem to really like because if they haven’t heard Chic or really listened to them properly then it’s a sort of like “Oh, this is great music I didn’t know about’. But if you have lived with Chic all your life, it’s still actually enjoyable to see someone tell the story.

It’s the same with obituaries and tributes to artists who’ve died. These are pieces that people really like, and that you as a writer get the most response. Like when Andy Gill from Gang of Four died... If you can write a piece - and you have to do it quickly, usually it involves staying up all night – that captures what was good about them and what was their contribution to music, people seem to really like that. It’s like delivering a eulogy at a funeral. There’s a real art to it. But just generally, in terms of music - including new stuff but also

old stuff as well - there's so much of it that people need *reasons* to listen to something. Like, why should I listen to this particular bit out of all the hugeness of music? So they turn to someone who's making a case or a narrative for that particular area of music, whether it's archival music or obscure new music. They might give it a genre name or identifies a pattern within it. That gives this surplus value to the listening that otherwise would just be sound, a bunch of interesting sounds or well produced sounds, but without the argument or the narrative, they wouldn't have any kind of shape, you know, or a feeling that it signifies. This is the role of the critic now. You have this very disordered, chaotic field of music, *so much music*, and you don't know what to listen to necessarily. The role of the critic is giving a kind of shape to this very amorphous, vast field of sounds. So that's encouraging for people like me and then for younger people I know who dream of writing about music. People still review records and do interesting, valuable reviews focusing just on that record. But the review function isn't as important because people can hear it themselves. In the old days, the critic was among the very first persons outside the band and the record company to hear it. And the reader might be looking for advice on whether to buy it or not. Now you can just hear it without having to buy it. But you still need to know what to listen to and why certain things might matter. So that's the continuing function of the critic. Another interesting role for the critic is this ongoing thing of rewriting the past and coming up with new senses of the past - what has been forgotten, what was neglected at the time. People are always inventing new genres to describe particular phases of past music, using terms that weren't used at the time.

**FT: Yeah, on a level, on all levels I think I completely agree with you. What I think changed a lot since... maybe fifteen, twenty years is the fact that for curious people of course this figure is very important to rewrite the past, to find new connections, to explain... But the casual listener, most of the time, is invited to listen stuff that's connected or sounds similar to what she or he already has listened to or liked before**

SR: I don't think I've ever let the algorithm guide me. Things flash up while I'm using a streamer or YouTube, things flash up tempting you and sometimes I'll click on a video out of curiosity or an album. But usually I'm a purposeful listener, I know what I want to play next because I've got things that I need to catch up with or things that are related to what I'm currently writing about. I don't have any personal knowledge but it is mystifying to me how my two sons seem to find out about music in a way that's largely outside the realm of music writing. Particularly the youngest kid Eli doesn't read reviews as far as I know. My oldest son Kieran does read music reviews because he's a music journalist. But the youngest one finds about all this contemporary music but I don't think there's interaction with a site like Pitchfork or music journalism. It's through other lateral methods of finding out about things. Through friends or tip offs or Tik Tok. But maybe there was always an element of that type of thing going on. For a lot of people, they never read music criticism, they just picked up on what they heard on the radio. The internet and streamers and social media, they are another form of a much more decentralized radio, in a way. The thing I liked about the radio was that it would play you things you didn't know you would like - not constantly but like every so often something would be played that was a total surprise. In particular the radio I grew up with, the DJs prided themselves on occasionally taking a risk on something. The daytime BBC Radio One pop deejays mostly played very safe, mainstream music but every month or so, they would push a record that really outside their usual range. That's how Laurie Anderson's *O Superman* became a big hit in the UK. It got to number 2 in the charts. I don't know if the algorithms have replicated that role to the same extent. I feel like they probably keep people within that zone they're already comfortable with.

**FT: Algorithms can be strange: before this conversation I was listening to "Where are we now" that David Bowie's track set in Berlin and I was thinking that it is so strange that Berlin is the one of the few places where David Bowie has situated himself in music writing. It's not entirely true, but it's a city he's connected to a lot and that he used as an actual reference even if he stayed here a couple of years. You know, the way Saint Etienne use London as a backdrop or a lot of LA band reference the geography of the city. I was**

**thinking “Why David Bowie didn’t do the same thing with London or New York where he lived way longer?”. And then the next track was by the AC/DC.**

SR: The algorithms and streamers are an extension of what radio programmers were doing in the States for decades. I grew up with the BBC thing, but in America radio was much more like a science. They got specialist programmers in to choose what was played. The radio station’s great fear is people changing to another station. So if you add new records to the playlist you have to make the choices very carefully, stay within this sort of safe zone of what the format of that station is set up as. The algorithms are like an version of that kind of knowledge that the old radio programmers used to get through research. There is this very famous radio consultant called Lee Abrams who advised hundreds and hundreds of stations around America on what to play. He changed the sound of radio in America in the 1980s. This science of getting people to stay tuned to your station and not skipping to another station has gone to a whole other level with streamers. I don't have any direct personal experience of being guided by the algorithm, because I use streamers and YouTube in an old fashioned way, almost like a record shop, and in a record shop, I would usually be looking for something.

**FT: This conversation is sponsored by Archivio Ricordi, and a lot of the themes you covered in your books are connected to a very specific form of archivist, I’m talking of course of the DJ.**

SR: That's definitely part of what deejaying became – an archivist. On the one hand, a lot of what deejaying is about is playing absolutely new music - the latest thing, the freshest beat. That developed with sound systems in Jamaica, then in the UK with dub plates in jungle and other genres, where it’s not even the latest releases, it’s music that hasn’t been released yet – and it won’t be out for maybe six months or longer. So it’s like music from the future. With dubplates, you’re hearing music that’s so new it isn’t available to buy yet. So that's one part of deejaying. But at the same time you had this parallel development of the deejay as archivist. Sometimes the same deejays that play the latest things are also taking on this curatorial role. The deejay as a collector and a sort of archaeologist who discovers rare tracks. That happens in a bunch of places simultaneously. It's happening in the earliest days of hip hop, where people are looking for breakbeats and finding them in all kinds of places - records from 1970s or late '60s, but also obscure funk tracks, African percussion record. All over the place they’re finding these beats they can recycle. And it’s the same in the early underground disco culture. Deejays are looking around to find very rhythmic percussive tracks that put dancers into a trance. But at the same time in the UK you have the Northern Soul scene where the whole culture is based around “rare soul” – mid-1960s tracks that were unsuccessful when they first came out but are good. And that makes them playable in this subculture of Northern Soul, which is English people in the 1970s who preferred Sixties soul and didn’t care for the direction that black music went in the 1970s. They are still fixated on the sound of Motown but they didn't want to play the obvious Motown hits. They want things that sound like Motown but are obscure and unknown. ‘Rare soul’, it was called at first: things that were good but just weren’t commercially successful, but still exist in the world, maybe in just a few hundred copies. And so you get this role of the DJ in the Northern Soul scene, he’s a cult figure but not for doing anything very clever with turntables. I think maybe they even only had one turntable! But they are revered because of their knowledge. Their entire reputation is based on this curatorial relationship with recent history – music that is from only ten years earlier, or less. It’s a subculture that is taking off in 1973, 1974, but the music is from ten years, or even just eight years earlier. But they had to look for it and find it. And when they find a record no one else has they want to hide that information. So they put stuff over the label that hides the title. The deejay becomes a hoarder and a hider of knowledge. That thing actually occurs in lots of different music subcultures, like the rockabilly collector scene. Collectors and deejays put concealer over the record label, or a false label from another, really shitty record! So that rival DJs can't find out what it is. They are preserving that knowledge, but on the other hand monopolizing - keeping it secret.

The deejay as a repository of obscure knowledge continues with hip hop, where it's all about digging in the crates and finding esoteric groovy records to sample. When DJs become producers and you have people like Premier and Prince Paul and the RZA. Same in jungle with the knowledge about breaks and things to sample. On the one hand they're making very new music, yet a lot of it is based on this knowledge of obscure records from the 1970s - funk and jazz and R&B records. And then someone like DJ Shadow turns that into a self-conscious art form. And then later it's people like Burial.

So there's a double thing with deejaying – on the one hand, it's about the latest, newest thing, about music that seems to be coming from the future. But there's the deejay as archeologist digging in the crates, finding this treasure from the recent past and reactivating it in the present.

**FT: This reminds of scene from a movie—if I remember correctly was called *Scratch*—where DJ Shadow is in the basement of this huge record store. He was crate digging and was playing one record and he looks at the pile of records and, I can't remember the exact words, but started referring to these piles of records as “memento mori”. A pile of inexpensive records where eventually your production will end up, eventually.**

SR: He talks about how all these groups dreamed of making it and being a stars. But most of them, they just make a few records that are now forgotten and gathering dust like in this basement. But maybe there's this one track on this one album they made where there's some magic in it. And Shadow as the sampler, the deejay-producer, can release that magic. Then the group has a kind of anonymous immortality through that. Their music comes alive again, their creativity and life force is brought back into the world. So there's something beautiful, but slightly eerie and ghostly about it. There's this basement area under the store and he's one of the only people allowed down there and it's like he's going into the vault of a pyramid, or a burial mound in Europe. A king buried with all this treasure. Except there's no king, there's just all these remnants of people and their musical dreams. Shadow said he once found a dead bat down there, so it's a Gothic sort of atmosphere. There's a feeling of going to the underworld, you know, and coming back with these sacred lost artifacts.

**FT: Are you a completist when it comes to music collecting?**

SR: Not really. There's a few labels where I've tried to get everything they've done, but never really pursued it all the way. A few electronic series of records like the Philips series Prospective 21eme siècle – 21st Century. They have these silver covers with weird geometric patterns on them. And the music's really amazing, the design is really attractive and I've collected quite a lot of them, but I'm a long way from having all of them. It would cost an awful lot of money to get them all, and you can hear nearly all the music online. There's also a few hardcore rave and jungle labels where I once desired to have all of the releases and I do have a lot of them. Labels like Reinforced and Moving Shadow. Maybe not all the way through to the end of the 1990s, but a certain golden stretch between 1990 to 1995. Great music all the way through, cool sleeves. And some oddball releases, weirdly interesting tracks and eccentric experiments. But generally, I'm not completist, and even with artists I really love, often I have not listened to all their records. Artists like Roy Harper or John Martyn. I tend not to listen to the whole body of work, because it almost becomes like work at a certain point. I tend to fixate on the two or three great albums they did. But with streaming now, it's very easy to make a playlist of everything that an artist did. Like all of Joni Mitchell. I love certain records by Joni Mitchell. But it's a very bad way to listen to an artist, listening to their entire discography. If you attempt to listen to it all over the course of a day or two days, you get very tired. It's not the right way to hear the stuff. When these records came out originally, there would be a long gap between *Court and Spark* and *The hissing of summer lawns* in which you would listen to *Court and Spark* many, many times. You'd absorb it, you'd adjust to the direction Joni Mitchell's music was going. You'd be ready for *The hissing of summer lawns*. But if you listen to the whole body of work in one continuous listen, it just kind of flattens it out. You don't digest the

music. I have made maybe hundreds of these sort of playlists of artists, going through the releases chronologically. But I rarely listen to them. Or I'll start and then give up. Making these playlists is a neurotic archiving thing. It's an intention to listen. I don't think it's a good way to listen to music.

**FT: But you did it with the Chic.**

SR: That was because I was writing a piece. And that was interesting because then you can see how many odd things they did. They didn't just do songs that sounded like "Good Times" and "Le Freak", they had all kinds of jazzy tunes and ballads. They really were serious musicians. So that was interesting.

**FT: Yeah, yeah. There's still, there's still a lot of room to play around.**

SR: People talk about 'deep cuts'. There's the songs by an artist that everyone knows and then there's the deep cuts, like an album track, the fourth track on side two, or something from an album that was three albums after the really successful album that everyone knows. Tracks where they experiment or do something quite unlike what everyone thinks they are about. So those would be the deep cuts.

**FT: Music—contrary to the environment where I mostly work which is to say the visual arts—was never too keen to discuss or “deconstruct” the criteria on which it builds various canons, lists of important records, histories. But this is changing in the last decade or so.**

SR: In the last ten, fifteen years that there has been quite a lot of movement within criticism to do this revisionist history where you take a genre that was never taken seriously at the time and you take it seriously. A critic or group of critics will try to recenter it. I'm trying to think of good examples. Freestyle - Latin freestyle as it is sometimes known – was a kind of music that was very popular in New York and Miami and wherever there was a large Latinx population in America. Probably the most famous crossover would be this group, Shannon, who had big hits with "Give Me The Night" and "Let The Music Play". There were a few other crossovers and Madonna's early songs have a little bit of that feel to them. It's electronic dance music but poppy and melodic and emotional. And that was never anything that anyone really took seriously. Certainly not in America. It wouldn't be reviewed in Rolling Stone or even The Village Voice. But there are people who said: "Oh, this was the sound of my youth". The critic Maura Johnston is someone who did a whole appreciation of freestyle. A popular sound of the Eighties that until recently wasn't on the critical map.

I suppose in a larger sense, disco has been re-centered as an essential kind of music. Lots of people know the story of the disco record burnings and the Disco Sucks movement. That's become a mythic event, where disco and the people who liked it are being oppressed by the totalitarianism of rock. In fact, it's got to the point where there is an overstatement of how much hostility to disco there was in rock culture. Because many of the most famous rock artists of that era made disco records - The Rolling Stones, Rod Stewart, Pink Floyd... *Another brick in the wall* is a discofunk record. And then a few years later Phil Collins is making records with the Earth, Wind and Fire horn section. For sure, there's some truth in this idea that disco was persecuted, but it also was widely embraced by rock performers. And I don't think that discophobia ever got as big in Europe or the UK as it was in America.

**FT: there was the gay factor, disco was perceived as decadent in the US whereas, there was a seamless evolution to house and techno in Europe. Disco just evolved in its own environment.**

SR: It has almost become a kind of game with people competing to find something from the past that was denigrated. There was the whole thing with "yacht rock", right? The rediscovery of Hall & Oates and other very slick and well-produced Eighties pop. In the eighties, indie rock groups and alternative rock groups hated that kind of music. A group like The Replacements or Husker Du was at war with that kind of music. But today's indie groups, that is one of the things that people draw on. Ariel Pink was a pioneer of that, and then

you have Haim. In terms of their positioning in music, they are essentially an alternative rock group, but they sound like Fleetwood Mac's *Tango In the Night* from 1987 with some Wilson Philips in there. Very polished, not indie as we expect. So history is constantly being reconfigured and adapted. That said, I don't think there are many areas left that are genuinely deserving of being rediscovered.

**FT: Yeah. It's sort of striking to see that there is the need to revive the notion that techno came from black producers in the Midwest whereas, while I was growing up it was almost self-evident: you would queue for hours and pay whatever to check a real deal DJ set by an artist from Detroit or Chicago.**

SR: Well, on the one hand, it's such an obvious fact that it is surprising if people don't know about Detroit techno and Chicago house. On the other hand, electronic dance music did spring up all over the place at the same time. Even staying with the bounds of black music, you had electro in New York happening at the same time as the earliest Detroit stuff. Germany, Italy, the UK – people were coming up with electronic dance music all through the eighties. Japan too with the Yellow Magic Orchestra. It's important for people to know about Detroit. But the technology was everywhere. Mostly it was Japanese companies that were making these machines, but those machines got everywhere: UK and Germany and the rest of America too. So there's a sense in which the ultra-fixation on Detroit as the origin is misleading. It's crucial to know how important those records were and how Detroit steered the music in a direction that took the songs out of it, making it largely instrumental music. But there's stuff going on in Frankfurt and in Sheffield that is also pushing in directions that will inform what happens in the Nineties rave culture.

**FT: Back to what you were saying I think there's not many spaces left for new historical discoveries made me think I bumped into an old acquaintance who was still, I think he's still, spinning gabber or hardcore styles or the evolution of those styles. And he said: "You know what? We're free because even if people dance to our music, there's no one in the world that will take us seriously in anyway. No one would trace or make what we're doing here "academic". This is happening here, serving the function it has to serve and that's it" I found it quite funny.**

SR: Yeah, that's true. Actually, within dance music, there are particular areas of music that are not historicized thoroughly or esteemed as much as others. Like Belgium techno in the early nineties. Trance music in general. But also like psychedelic trance – it's not considered part of the Canon. But it's a hugely popular music. My book *Energy Flash* covers a lot of music, but there's some things that are passed over in the text quite quickly that someone else could go into enormous detail about. There's definitely room for more histories to be rediscovered or brought out.

**FT: Yeah. And just out of curiosity, as a last question, I don't know if it fits the conversation. Are you studying for a new project? A book project?**

SR: I'm not working on anything at the moment. I've got a lot of ideas. I'm trying to decide which one is the most exciting - what's exciting for me, but also what people would be excited to read about. And also what I could sell so that I can afford to do it. I have loads of ideas, things I'd love to write about, but if you do a book, you have to think: is there a need for it? Are there enough people who'd want to read it? Probably it would be something historical. Probably some area of music in the past I would look at again and that I feel hasn't quite been historicized fully. But I'm teaching and it takes quite a lot of my time.

**FT: Oh really? What is the class? What do you teach?**

SR: Last semester I did a thing called *Studies in experimental pop*. And then, in the current semester, I'm doing a course in DIY cultures and the idea of the underground in music, and I'm also teaching a class about the voice - experimental uses of the voice. That is something I would like to write a book about, but then I wonder: is there a demand for such a book? It's not obvious to me that lots of people would want to read that. Or even anyone! So the fact that I'd be really interested to do it – that isn't quite enough. The retro



book, there wasn't really any particular sense of a demand for it, but there was a sense that people were talking about the subject. When I was writing *Retromania*, every month I'd see an article sort of saying 'there's so much retro music', and I started to feel like I had to hurry to finish the book quickly. The conversation had already started on this topic! Whereas I don't necessarily see a conversation about experimental uses of the voice in pop music. Although it's going on in current music, it's like a very noticeable thing with conceptual electronic music. Most of the people use the voice in some weird way, and they often use their own voice, but they process it. Holly Herndon famously, but there's loads of examples of people using the voice. And then there's the whole Auto-Tune thing of the last 10 years or so. It was really interesting to watch the use of that technology in hip hop and other kinds of street music. In fact, this guy Kit Mackintosh wrote a book called *Neon Screams* that's all about the use of Auto-Tune in trap and dancehall.

But it's quite interesting being a teacher. I have done that kind of thing before, but this is like the first real job. Not full time, but it's a big part of my week.

**FT: ah, so of course it's an art school...**

SR: It's an arts school - Calarts. They have a music department, and the students I teach are mostly musicians. So that is interesting, not being a musician myself. I know quite a bit about music technology - a bit more than your average music journalist - but not anything like what these students know about technology. And I don't know scales and keys and things like that. So I have to find ways to reach them and connect what I know about to what they know about.