

Speed Limits: Accelerationism, Popular Futurism and the Decline of Jungle Drum & Bass



Image from AWOL, Ministry of Sound nightclub, London. Photo: James Burns

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Speed Limits

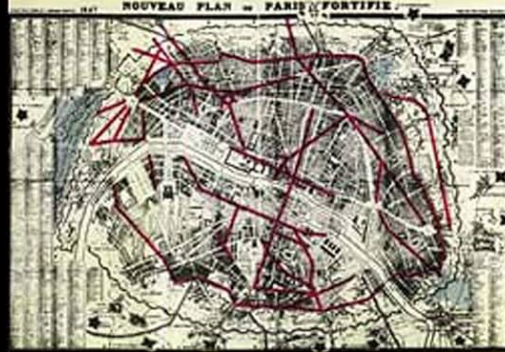
- Accelerated Culture & Accelerationism
 - Speed in Jungle Drum & Bass
 - Speed as Friction
 - The End of Future Shock

***Debate – can jungle drum & bass (and / or other fast and futuristic EDM styles) still anticipate the future?**

semiotext(e) | a history of the present

SPEED AND POLITICS

Paul Virilio



<e>

Theories of **accelerated culture** often focus on:

- the projection of power via cultural and economic processes in capitalist and late-capitalist (post)modernisation
- the impact of media technologies as the perceived extension of a generalised military-industrial complex. For example ...

Accelerated Culture (Theorists)

Zygmunt Bauman:

“**Velocity of movement** and access to faster means of mobility steadily rose in modern times to the position of the principal tool of **power and domination** ... Once the distance passed in a unit of time came to be dependent on **technology**, on artificial means of transportation, all extant, inherited limits to the speed of movement could be in principle transgressed” (*Liquid Modernity*, 2006: 9) ...

David Harvey:

“The general effect, then, is for ‘capitalist modernization’ to be very much about **speed-up and acceleration in the pace of economic processes** and, hence, in **social life**” (*The Condition of Postmodernity*, 1989: 230) ...

Paul Virilio:

“The **violence of speed** has become both the violence and the law, the world’s destiny and its destination” (*Speed & Politics*, 1986: 151) ...

Speed & Electronic Dance Music

'Hardcore' forms of EDM explore the limits of the body's motility augmented with the 'body technologies' (Rietveld, 1998) of speed-based psychoactive drugs like MDMA ...

Benjamin Noys:

"BPM, or beats per minute had become increasingly significant in electronic dance music during the 1990s and styles like **hardcore and drum & bass took the music of global youth culture to **new, body-disturbing speeds.**"**
(Malign Velocities: Acceleration & Capitalism, 2014: 142)

Paul Virilio & Sylvère Lotringer:

"Real time reigns supreme. That's why **music is the art of reference, that is an art of time and acceleration. It's **an art of time and speed**. It's even the first to have given form to speed. It's not by chance that young people only have one art, and that's music."** *(Pure War, 1997: 172)*

Speed in Jungle Drum & Bass

Jungle / drum and bass music ...

Began in the early-1990s as an embodied working-class response to the lived uncertainties of deindustrialisation in late-capitalist (accelerated) culture ...

- **Sampled breakbeats** – remnants of human bodily performativity in the context of digitally-generated, *post-human* music (Christodoulou, 2020).
- **Accelerated to tempos of approximately 170 BPM** (beats-per-minute) - around twice the speed of the 1960s and 1970s soul and funk records from which 'breaks' are often sourced.
- Early terms for jungle drum and bass ('darkcore' or 'dark jungle') – the **urban jungle is being accelerated beyond the control of working-class people by outside forces**, to the extent that even the perception of time is itself questioned.

Bring the Break-Beat Back!

Authenticity and the Politics of Rhythm in Drum 'n' Bass

Chris Christodoulou

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12801/1947-5403.2020.12.01.08>

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the critical divergences between rhythm and repetition in contemporary drum 'n' bass music in three key ways. First, it shows how the characteristic "chopping" and acceleration of sampled break-beats emphasises continuity with the past, thereby placing the genre in a continuum of Black Atlantic cultural practice that articulates historical recuperation as a political priority, while signifying the *discontinuity* of time in an accelerated culture. Secondly, it addresses the persistent use of live break-beats as an impulse within the genre to emphasise competing discourses of authenticity in the context of Black Atlantic cultural memory. Thirdly, having examined the embodied performativity valorised in the sampling of live break-beats, the article shows how the critical valuation of rhythmic characteristics can function as a catalyst of genre mutation and sub-genre development in drum 'n' bass and other electronic dance music genres.

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FEATURED • Christodoulou brings the break-beat back in to drum 'n' bass research • Charles examines genre and music-making in psytrance practice • Chambers explores crisis and creativity in the studio as TAZ • Castagner navigates peace, conflict and spherology in Montreal psytrance

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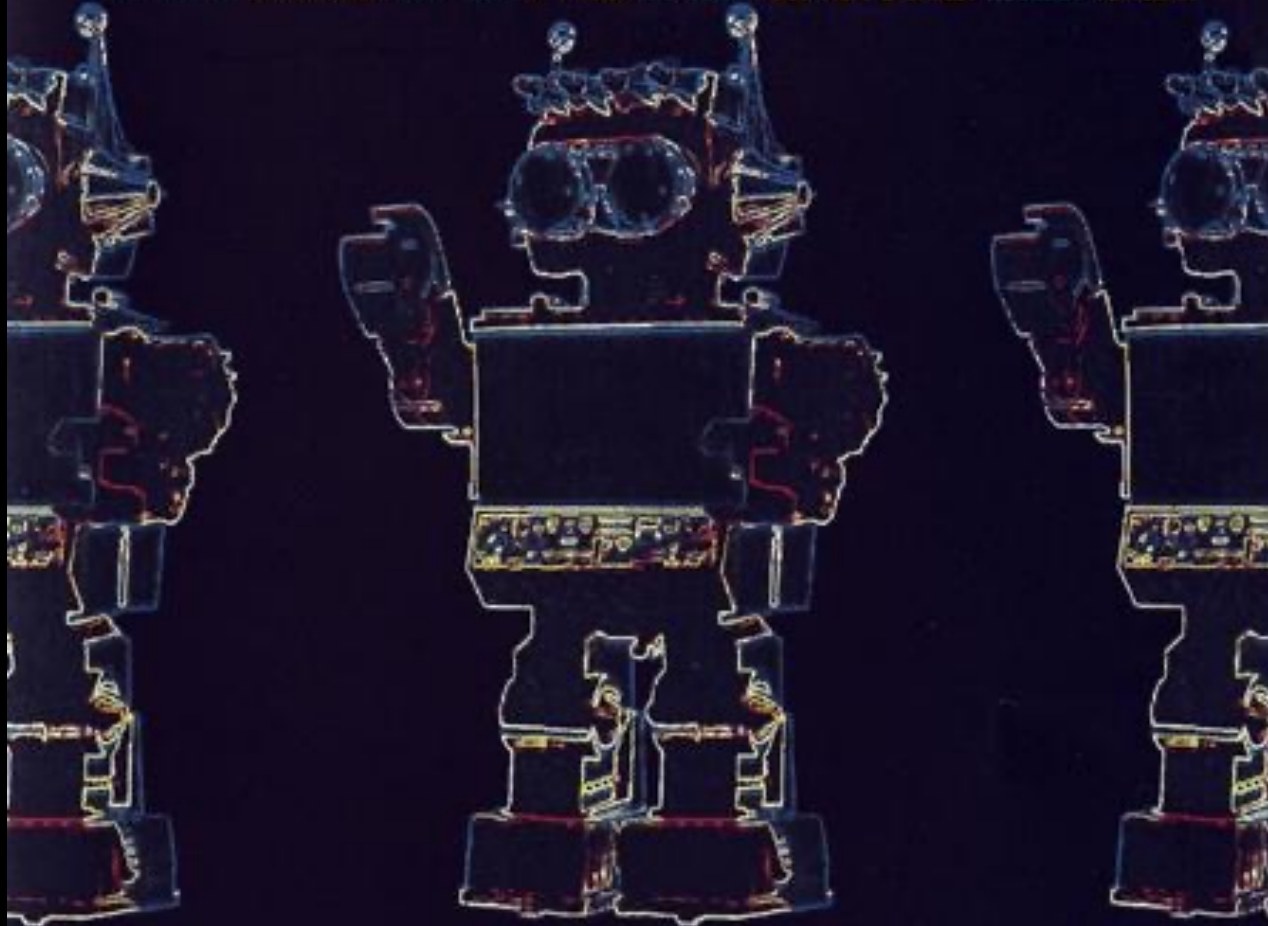
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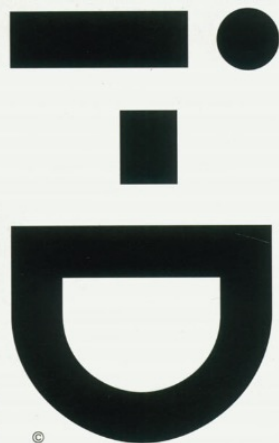
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Early compilation: *Jungle Tekno: Vol. 1*, Jumpin and Pumpin, 1992*

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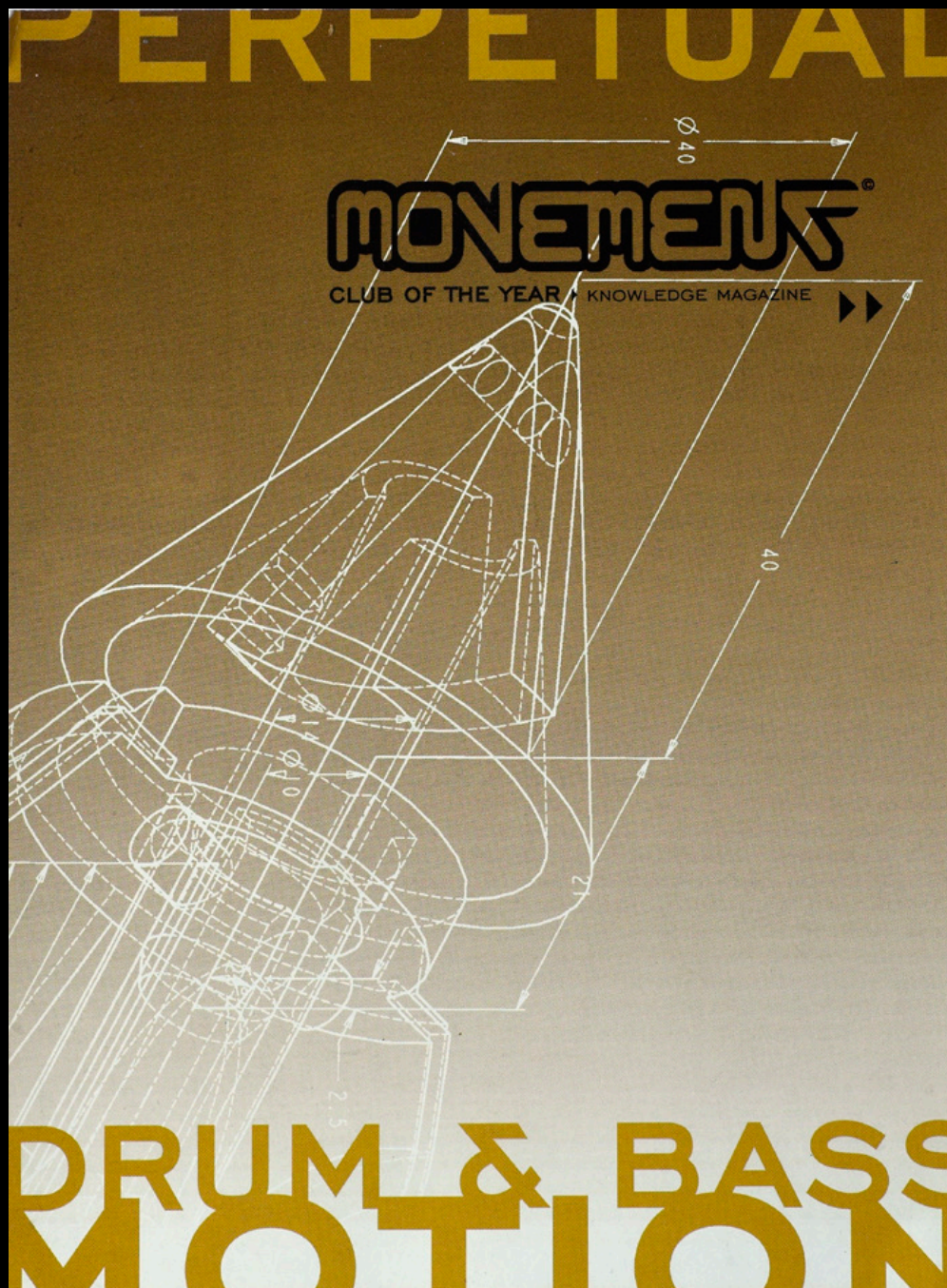
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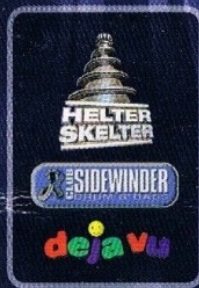
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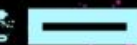
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Speed discursively
linked to jungle drum
and bass in the form
of its thematic
darkness ...



Sukhdev Sandhu, preface to the novel *Junglist*, by Two Fingas and James T. Kirk:

“He (Kirk) found jungle intimate and immersive – a sometimes demonised music to which young kids, in darkened spaces the size of chill-out zones, were still figuring out how to dance. It was a music that was **impossibly accelerationist**. Its rhythms thrillingly alien. Its **darkness radiant**.” (2021: 2)



'Dark' jungle drum & bass variants and sub-genres dominate the style [Doc Scott, Goldie and Randall – Metalheadz record label and club night*]



abstract culture .:

swarm1

5. Ccru- Swarmachines

The situationists,

Neither individuals nor groups. Neither remembered nor expected.

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All exclusive definition is banked at light-speed.
Cryonic mummification into undead Spectacle,
Real subsumption into the media.
Virekonomics.

How do situational vectors cross World-War-4?

All code-process is military manoeuvre: constrictions and escapes, intelligence collection, disinformation,
mapping, virus.

Truth and falsity are derivative factors, and strictly technical, in relation to the primary and secondary features
of alignment and orientation.

Strategic power consolidation, tactical melting into the jungle.

swarm 1

1. Nick Land-[Meltdown](#)
2. Kodwo Eshun-[Motion Capture](#)
3. R.Mackay/M.Fisher-[Pomophobia](#)
4. Rohit Lekhi-[Futureloop/Black Bedlam](#)
5. Ccru-[Swarmachines](#)

swarm 2

1. Steve Metcalf-[Killing Time/Strife Kolony/NeoFuturism](#)
2. Angus Carlyle-[Amortal Kombat/No UFOs](#)
3. Rob Heath & Christina Paouros-[Destination 3000 Degrees](#)
4. David Cole-[Post-Cybernetic Judicial War](#)
5. Iain Hamilton Grant-[Burning AutoPol/Oedipus](#)

swarm 3

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A.Greenspan-[Amphibious Maidens](#)
2. Kodwo Eshun-[Abducted by Audio \(Live\)](#)
3. Steve Goodman-[Darkcore](#)
4. Tom Epps-[The Body of Foucault](#)
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digital hyperstition

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[The Templeton Episode](#)
7. Ccru - [Pandemonium](#)
8. Ccru - [Glossary](#)

Cut-out romantic revolutionism and it leaves dark events. Autopropagated happenings.
Assembly lines taken below visibility and switched to intensity-production,

Imperceptible mutations

Paris in flames, 1996. This time it's not revolution, but war. Not a matter of long hours or exam papers, but the rise of a Eurofascist culture fuelled by nostalgic lamentations for the destiny of man. Especially the

In the mid-90s, the accelerationist *Cybernetic Culture Research Unit* (CCRU) identified jungle's use of digitally sped-up breakbeats as a signifier for the post-humanisation of subjectivity ...

Jungle's ecstatic darkness functions rhapsodically for the loss of the human, or the retreat of a purist notion of humanity.



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*CCRU – *Swarmachines* (1996) http://ccru.net/swarm1/1_swarm.htm

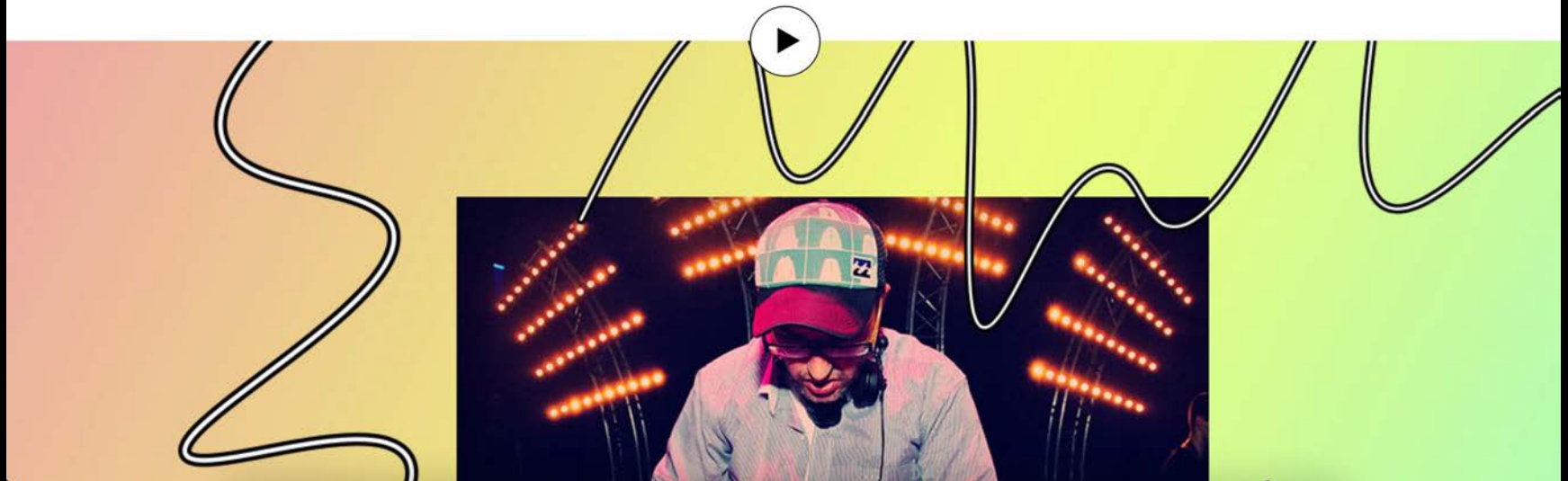
“Don't get into a false sense of security. It's not just music. Jungle is the abstract diagram of planetary **inhuman becoming**. Dread out of control. A post-spectacular immersive tactility that no humanist vision can put you in touch with.” (Collectively attributed to the CCRU, but probably written by Nick Land.)



Does jungle drum and bass fetishise the acceleration that affirms much of its audience's socio-cultural powerlessness ...?

FEATURES

Drum and Bass Not Dead

By [Laurent Fintoni](#) · July 15, 2014

In a few short years, jungle drum & bass went from being an emblematic music for the attainment of a post-human future, to being declared 'dead' (at least in the popular media) ...

In 1999, BBC Radio 1 DJ Steve Lamacq dedicated a show to the question 'Is **drum & bass dead?**', following an article in *Mixmag* that ran with the same provocative title ... Yet, JDB survives, albeit outside mainstream pop music culture ...

There is too much speed ...

Thesis 1 – speed is now pervasive, so the critical and creative ‘friction’ between past, present and future, and between human and technology, has been lost

The (mainstream) cultural profile of JDB has ironically diminished at a time of intensified cultural acceleration and interest in post-human subjective states ...

Noys refers to the friction needed between the human and the technological to grasp the accelerative aesthetics of hardcore EDM:

“(The) felt sense of aesthetic acceleration depends on the slowing down and increasing of speed, the differences between elements that generates a productive friction.”

[‘Dance and Die: Obsolescence and Embedded Aesthetics of Acceleration’, *Accelerated Youth*, 2014: 305]

Still 170+ bpm, but JDB doesn’t sound that fast anymore; creative movement away from sped-up breakbeats that were originally played by human drummers ...

JDB speed now ‘frictionless’ – signifies threshold into the post-human already crossed via techno-capitalist acceleration. Speed without any reference to the human.

There is no longer a critical distance from which to evaluate speed.

Speed is slowing culture down ...

Thesis 2 – a sense of radical futurism has disappeared; acceleration has succumbed to stasis and inertia

Techno-capitalism is **slowing the future down** (e.g., 'Trussonomics' damaging the UK economy with failed attempt to rapidly accelerate growth via tax cuts for the rich; the cultural slowdown of the pandemic, etc)

As such, jungle drum & bass as a signifier of post-human accelerationism no longer has the same critical or cultural relevance ...

Mark Fisher adopted the term 'future shock' from Alvin Toffler to convey jungle's initial radical foregrounding of temporal disjuncture:

"I think that sense of **future shock is what has disappeared** ... I suppose coming to musical consciousness at the end of post-punk, when there was a more or less explicit intolerance towards the recent past ... And when (post-punk) played out, other areas of music took over, most notably jungle, which when you heard it you thought, 'I've never heard anything like this'. That's the simple sense of future shock."

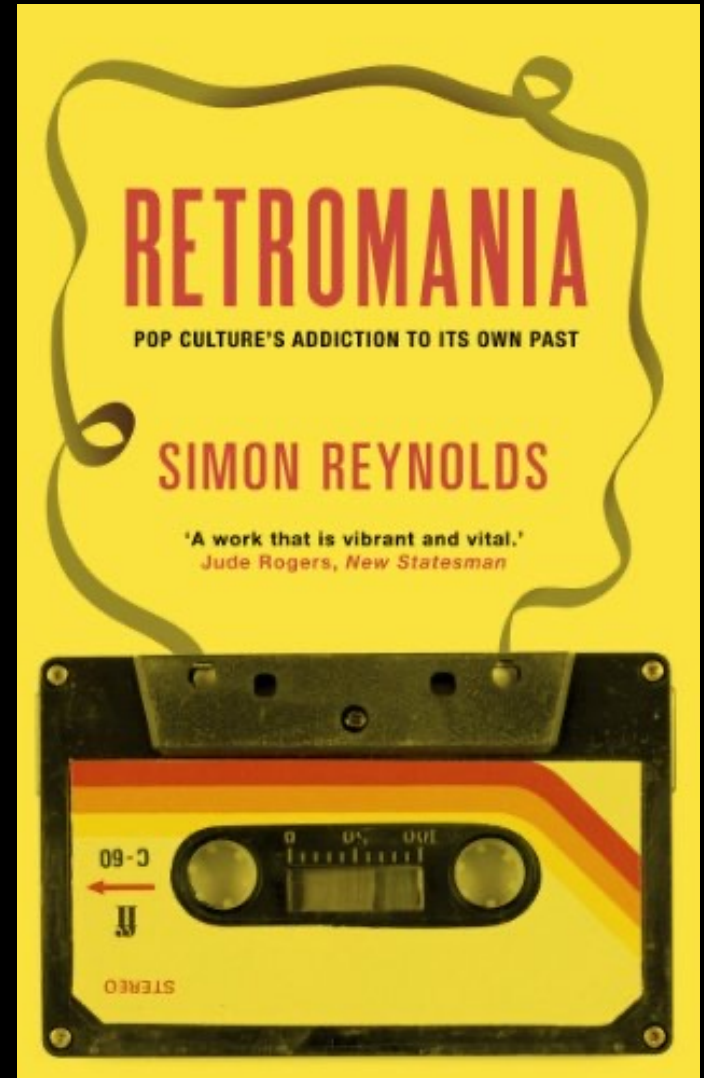
[Brooks, A. 'Do You Miss the Future? Mark Fisher Interviewed', *Crack*, 12 September 2014, <https://crackmagazine.net/article/long-reads/mark-fisher-interviewed/>]

Thesis 1 + Thesis 2 = ?

Simon Reynolds – Web 2.0+ / online culture allows users to rapidly switch between media content from vastly differing periods (YouTube, etc). Thereby, culture is experienced as a “**paradoxical combination of speed and standstill**” (2011: 63).

[*Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to its Own Past*, London, Faber and Faber]

Speed now increasingly experienced as **simulation** via film, video games, and other screen media, rather than specifically through the physical materiality of EDM ...



How D&B label Hospital Records became a 'Forza' mainstay

We sat down with label co-founder Chris Goss, who talks D&B, using Forza to break America, the art of creating music for games, and why Hospital Records just keeps on going

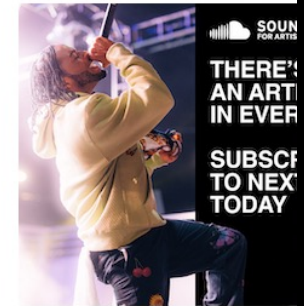
By **Tom Regan** | 7th January 2022



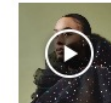
Forza Horizon 5. Credit: Playground Games

When it comes to dance music, there's nothing more British than drum and bass. Originating in murky warehouses across Bristol and London, its pummelling explosion of breakbeats and stomach-churning basslines paved the way for legendary raves, the ecstasy movement and arguably rave culture itself. 30 years on, it's a genre that stubbornly refuses to die. Despite rarely infiltrating the house-obsessed mainstream, its high tempo still sends thousands of moon-pupiled ravers into an absolute frenzy every weekend. Yet outside of our fair isle, the genre doesn't quite get the love it so dearly deserves. Or it didn't until the release of Xbox racer *Forza Horizon 2*.

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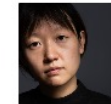
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