



Zeitgeist busters

Description

“Turn on, tune in, drop out” that was the spirit of the late 1960s, the mood of those times, their Zeitgeist.



Information panel in the 1960s section of the York Castle Museum.

What about the current age? Everything is a copy, so [turnitin](#) replaces “turn on,” [itunes](#) is the new “tune in” and [dropbox](#) replaces “drop out.” At a time where everyone would rather be elsewhere, *turn off, drop everything, and turn up late*, also serves as a mood mantra.

This is also the spam age. Sifting through those unwanted emails ruins the flow of work and personal communications, and messes it for everyone. Spoilers rule: hatetweets, phishing, inflammatory emails.

As well as online business, the Internet is taken over by *unfinished* business. Incomplete projects clog up servers, along with unanswered emails, unread tweets, dead links, links never clicked, untended comment fields – not to mention unfulfilled entrepreneurial ambitions. It's the age of the lazypreneur.

It's also the age of antisocial media, and a generation has emerged of people who are exercised less by the possibilities offered by the Internet's newness than expecting it just to deliver what they want. Some try to evade its hegemony, to go undetected, or simply give up on any notion of personal privacy. This is after all a *postdigital* age.

Zeitgeists come and go with such rapidity and specificity they are really just fads. With so many channels of information Zeitgeist gets replaced by [what's trending](#). This is the age of the broken Zeitgeist.

Zeitgeist revisited

But what if there really is no prevailing mood of a time? At best the claim to have identified it is a convenient fiction, an acknowledged gross generalisation, a provocation, an overstatement to bring into consciousness something strange that would otherwise pass unnoticed.

At worst the idea of the Zeitgeist assumes everyone is in the same condition, what counts is what's purveyed by the mass media (and its online extensions), and that human society is uniform across the planet and drifts from one state of consensus to another. In the old Hegelian sense of Zeitgeist it also implies the presence of prophets and elites who have the genius capacity to detect, express, influence and advise on the current mood. But thanks to the Internet, we all have a voice now – whether or not anyone is listening.

Notes

- Turn on, tune in, drop out is attributed to Timothy Leary, as the poster says.
- What I've outlined here is well known to historians and philosophers of history. This is *historicism*, which is a concern with the peculiarities of a time and place in which events unfold, and with the character of a community. A historicist thinks it's the job of the scholar or cultural critic to penetrate the essential spirit of a country or period.
- In my discipline of architecture, historicism treats interpretation and history as the processes of uncovering the grand idea. Great architecture gives expression to the spirit, mood and aspirations of a people, and history presents it as such.
- Historicism is largely attributed to German idealism, exemplified in the historical theorizing of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). We discuss the issue in relation to hermeneutics in the Introduction to Snodgrass, Adrian, and Richard Coyne. 2006. *Interpretation in Architecture: Design as a Way of Thinking*. London: Routledge.



Category

1. Culture

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1. mood
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