



## 2011 and all that

### Description

I am reviewing my early blog posts on technology, media and culture. The compilation here includes weekly posts between 9 April and 31 December 2011.

The posts make reference to actual events that year. These include: Apple's iPad 2 release; the impact of social media in the January Arab Spring; Osama Bin Laden's death; the death of Kim-Jong Il; Barack Obama and the raid on Abbottabad; the proliferation of Social Media (esp. Facebook) in architecture studios and broader society; Ayn Rand and Adam Curtis's *All Watched Over* documentary; the 'I am Spartacus' Twitter meme emerging from the Paul Chambers tweet case; LulzSec Hacking Group targeting Sony, CIA, and others; the News of the World phone hacking scandal; the riots in England triggered by the police shooting of Mark Duggan; Ofcom's Communications Market Report about smartphone addiction; and the rise of Augmented Reality Apps (e.g., Aurasma).

I deployed these events to trigger discussions of language use in social media, territoriality, metaphor, architectural space, digital pragmatics, changing design studio practices, individualism, hacking, branding, concepts of addiction and spatial affordances.

I asked ChatGPT to identify similarities and differences between how I developed these themes in 2011 and how situations and attitudes have changed since.

## 2011 update

Since these posts appeared in 2011, many of the themes have deepened in relevance, while others have shifted in emphasis or been recast by new technologies and events. The idea that language encodes territorial claims remains salient, but now through platform dialects, content moderation regimes, and memetic patterns that demarcate insider status—especially on TikTok, Discord, and other socially fragmented spaces. These codings operate less through conscious signalling and more as background conditioning.

The once-optimistic view of interconnection through the Internet of Things has been tempered. Global crises such as the pandemic have made visible the fragility of these networks. Rather than celebrating connection, much recent thinking addresses disconnection, friction, and repair, particularly in the context of smart cities and supply chains.

Heidegger's *thing* has gained new resonance through speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, but the proliferation of generative AI has complicated what it means to attend to a *thing* as situated, embodied, or meaningful. We now encounter countless digital artefacts without obvious provenance or intentionality—objects without craftspeople.

Themes of metaphor, once exemplified through Vico and Ricoeur, now resurface in how we describe AI itself. Terms like *learning*, *thinking*, and *hallucination* have migrated into public discourse without shared clarity. The figure of the oracle or the ghost recurs in attempts to grasp what these models are doing, pointing back to older religious or mystical frames that resist disenchantment.

Architecture, formerly examined through the metaphor of the hideout, now contends more explicitly with visibility and concealment through surveillance infrastructures, biometric systems, and *dark* logistics buildings. These spaces challenge our sense of what is symbolically or socially legible in the built environment.

The earlier invocation of pragmatism, particularly in relation to Obama, sits differently today. Design thinking, once celebrated as a practical bridge between theory and action, has been critiqued for offering shallow, managerial fixes to deep structural problems. More grounded approaches—care, maintenance, refusal—have entered the discourse in both political theory and design practice.

Narrative complexity in film and media, once a novelty, has become a structural feature of streaming ecosystems. At the same time, algorithms curate simplified or familiar content, leading to a cultural bifurcation between excess and ease—between labyrinthine multiverses and comfort-viewing playlists.

The post about collective voice and protest (*I am Spartacus*) prefigured today's meme solidarities, but those forms of expression now contend with co-optation, fatigue, and the technical challenges of amplification. Meanwhile, literal voice technologies—cloning, synthesis, impersonation—raise ontological and political questions about what a voice is and who can claim one.

The trickster archetype identified in hacker culture has spread into entrepreneurial tech subcultures, where mischief, irony, and subversion are commodified. Yet concerns about model manipulation and data poisoning reveal persistent ambiguities around boundaries, legitimacy, and trust.

Where once smartphone use was framed in terms of habit over addiction, now the focus is on how design itself shapes behaviour, thought, and attention. Surveillance has become not

only external but internalised, refracted through the interface.

Media ethics, previously animated by the phone hacking scandal, have re-emerged in the context of AI-generated content and collapsing trust in journalism. Questions of responsibility, authorship, and authority are now entangled with opaque platform logics and rapid content generation.

Finally, memory—once contrasted with data storage—has been transformed by systems that index, retrieve, and simulate information. Collective memory, mediated by language models and recommendation engines, is no longer just a social phenomenon but a technical one as well, and the line between remembering and generating grows increasingly difficult to locate.

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I followed this review with questions to the AI about **whose** way of think speaking or acting underwent transformation since 2011. E.g. —now the focus is on how design itself shapes behaviour, thought, and attention.— I ask: whose focus? Are we speaking of academics, critical journalist, developers, designers, consumers, users — what constituencies and in what places? A critique of generalisations implied by discussions about *trends* is for another discussion. See post: [What's wrong with post-digital cultures](#).

Here is a version of the posts in this compilation —read— in order by Speechify. It runs for over 2.5 hours. I edited out meta-data and have indicated where I am quoting sources. The audio can be accessed as a podcast by copy pasting this url into a podcast service such as Apple Podcast: <http://richardcoyne.com/category/podcast/feed/>

## Note

- Featured image caption: an overgrown hedge labyrinth in ruins, situated within a decaying British country estate, created with DALL·E, OpenAI's legacy image generation model. The scene captures the atmosphere of neglect and faded grandeur from an oblique aerial perspective.

## Category

1. Architecture
2. Artificial Intelligence
3. Podcast

## Tags

1. media
2. review
3. update

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