



Vintage futures

Description

I'm continuing the theme from the last post of looking back and looking forward. To that end I am reviewing the next set of posts authored in 2012. I start with the romance with digital technologies as they were then.

When I wrote *Vitruvius does steampunk* in 2012, I was interested in how steampunk revelled in retro-futurism: imagining Victorian contraptions that never were, delighting in conspicuous mechanics, and offering a critique of modern technologies.

I linked it back to Vitruvius, whose descriptions of hoists, water clocks and catapults might serve a similar purpose as precursors of the technoromantic cycle — our oscillation between awe, fear, nostalgia for craft, and renewed technological optimism. See my book [Technoromanticism](#) of 1999.

From the perspective of 2025, the machine in question has transitioned. Where I once pointed to steam engines and microchips as objects of fascination and dread, it is now artificial intelligence that fills that role of promoting sublime awe and anxious resistance. Like the steam locomotive, AI is celebrated for uniting and transforming, yet feared for running out of control. (See recent post: [AI and the devil](#).)

And just as steampunk invited us to re-imagine history through ludic reconstruction, I see similar gestures in the way people turn to retro aesthetics and speculative narratives to make sense of AI. The cycle continues: awe, monstrosity, nostalgia, unity — though the machinery has changed.

Interpretation, mood, belief, ageing, creativity

- 117. [Vitruvius does steampunk](#)
- 118. [Shojo Manga morals](#)
- 119. [Universities as interpretive communities](#)
- 120. [Old enough to know better](#)
- 121. [What does it all mean?](#)
- 122. [Lego logics](#)
- 123. [Web of belief](#)

- 124. [Interpretation by design](#)
- 125. [Ambient wit](#)
- 126. [The happy medium](#)
- 127. [Is the high street ruining the Internet?](#)
- 128. [Pleasure with malice](#)

Here's a summary of the rest of the posts in the sequence, aided by ChatGPT. The post on **shōjo manga** treated manga as a medium of transformation and gender fluidity, already tied into global merchandising and cosplay cultures. Since then, anime and manga aesthetics have become even more mainstream, shaping fashion, music videos, and the aesthetics of AI-generated imagery. The questions about childhood, innocence, and sexuality remain pressing, though they are now inflected by debates about online identity, avatars, and virtual embodiment.

The discussion of **universities as interpretive communities** seems prophetic. Since 2012, universities have indeed been grappling with questions of authority, interpretation, and dialogue, but now against the backdrop of digital platforms, remote learning, and algorithmic management. The idea that universities function as hermeneutic communities seems all the more relevant as academics and students negotiate the authority of AI-mediated knowledge and machine-graded assessments.

The post on **ageing and stereotypes** anticipated the digital inclusion of older populations. By 2025, many over-70s are indeed habitual internet users, and new challenges arise around accessibility, digital health, and the role of older citizens as content creators and influencers. The cartoonish stereotypes of old age seem even more outdated in a world where longevity and "active ageing" are social priorities.

Posts on **hermeneutics and interpretation**—whether about Gadamer, Lego logics, or architecture—also look different now. In 2012, there was still an open question about whether design could be thought of as interpretation. Now, with AI design tools producing outputs that demand human curation, the idea that "to design is to interpret" appears prescient: interpretation, negotiation, and contextual judgement are the skills that distinguish human design work from automated generation.

The meditations on **belief, media, mood, and persuasion** were already framed by social media's rise. What has changed is the scale and intensity of these phenomena. Ambient media has given way to immersive and algorithmically personalised environments; the tracking of "gross national happiness" via tweets looks rudimentary compared to the sentiment analysis and mood prediction embedded in today's platforms. Yet the paradox noted in 2013—that we seek out complex emotions, and even resist the ones media try to induce—remains true.

Finally, the concern about whether the **high street was ruining the internet** now looks almost quaint. E-commerce has long outpaced the high street, but the deeper worry has become the extent to which the internet itself has been reshaped by large commercial platforms. The quirky, experimental "people's medium" of the early web has been largely absorbed into global corporate ecosystems, though subcultures, independent creators, and alternative networks still carry its spirit.

Altogether, these posts show how ideas of interpretation, mood, belief, ageing, and creativity persist, even as the technological frame has shifted. The questions asked in 2012–13 remain important, but they now play out against the backdrop of artificial intelligence, platform dominance, and the embedding

of digital media into every sphere of life.

Note

- Featured image is by ChatGPT: For the blogpost banner please generate a post apocalyptic image of a redundant steampunk communication apparatus (as found in a computer game). Add an active cathode ray screen with a flickering image.

Category

1. Artificial Intelligence
2. Podcast

Tags

1. ageing
2. belief
3. emotion
4. Romanticism
5. technology

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