CLAIRE NALLY

STEAMPUNK

GENDER, SUBCULTURE & THE NEO-VICTORIAN

Steampunk

Library of Gender and Popular Culture

From *Mad Men* to gaming culture, performance art to steampunk fashion, the presentation and representation of gender continues to saturate popular media. This new series seeks to explore the intersection of gender and popular culture, engaging with a variety of texts – drawn primarily from Art, Fashion, TV, Cinema, Cultural Studies and Media Studies – as a way of considering various models for understanding the complementary relationship between 'gender identities' and 'popular culture'. By considering race, ethnicity, class and sexual identities across a range of cultural forms, each book in the series will adopt a critical stance towards issues surrounding the development of gender identities and popular and mass cultural 'products'.

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& Popular Culture

Steampunk

Gender, Subculture and the Neo-Victorian

Claire Nally

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Acknowledgements

This book is for Hector Eunan Richard Wingate Burns – a wee soul growing up in the best tradition, with 'no gods, no masters'.

Series Editors' Introduction

As many books in this series explore, popular culture often develops or derives inspiration from subcultures. In this book, Claire Nally explores one such subculture as it has evolved in the twenty-first century. Although not limited to the period of Queen Victoria's reign, steampunk re-evaluates the historical impact of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, rendering this aspect of Victorian period relevant to the present. Nally traces steampunk from the 1980s, in a political context where Margaret Thatcher was espousing 'Victorian values' as foundational to her policies in that decade. Whilst steampunk embraces Victoriana, the conservative values attached to politics in the 1980s remain a context against which the steampunk texts investigated here can be measured.

As Nally explores in this book, one of the problems with steampunk's obsession with Victorian aesthetics is that of the gendered politics that underlie such an historical period. For example, the steampunk aesthetic for women's costume is based around the corset, a garment that carries with it the conservative connotations of social as well as physical containment of women, but in steampunk culture it can also be viewed as something akin to a warrior's breastplate. Thus the rearticulation of Victorian aesthetics in steampunk is not a straight forward copy. However, the inherent gender politics of steampunk are not without their wider political problems, and Nally's study here investigates this in the twenty-first century context, where she examines its Janus-faced nature in terms of nineteenth-century values and twenty-first century neo-liberalism.

Unlike other subcultures in this Library which emerge from film, music and social movements, steampunk began as a literary form. However, as with other emergent cultures, it has spread across a range

of genres and thus can be found lurking in other studies within this Library. The influence of steampunk can be seen on popular culture texts such as the long-running television series Doctor Who (where the set design of the Tardis under David Tennant's Doctor was heavily influenced by steampunk aesthetics), and crops up in music videos across a wide range of musical genres.

Nally's discussion of steampunk practice consequently includes representations in subcultural zines, music, and art, as well as the more mainstream popular cultural uses in film, television, graphic novels, and neo-Victorian literature. As Nally argues, steampunk manages to be found thriving in both popular culture and in subculture. Such crossovers can be found in many of books in this Library, particularly those that are dealing with subject matter that has emerged from subcultural contexts.

Introduction

Defining steampunk

In 2011, I attended the 'Empire' Ball at the Asylum, one of the foremost UK steampunk festivals in Lincoln. A man, in frock coat and top hat, approached me and asked me whether I was accompanied by a gentleman. He then proceeded to ask me about my sexual predilections. It is worth addressing at the outset that steampunk is playful, taking an ironic and critical approach to historical and cultural material from the Victorian period, with especial focus on the technology and science of the Industrial Revolution. But was this man's retrogressive comment, and the imperialist connotations of the event, as playful, ironic and critical as I was supposed to think?

In many of the texts addressed in the following pages, the notion that steampunk is a radical counterculture embedded in aesthetic resistance to modern mass production is questioned. Thus, this book not only posits an uncertainty about the depth of steampunk's irony but also reaches far beyond the limitations of the subculture in order to explore the ways in which gender politics function in the twenty-first century, as well as the unique contribution steampunk makes to such debates.

Steampunk is both a genre in art and literature, and a subculture within contemporary popular culture as a whole. The literary genre emerged in the 1980s, evolving from cyberpunk, and the subculture has followed with its affiliations to the goth, punk and DIY subcultures. Participants heavily invested in the scene include

musicians, artists, writers and subcultural aficionados, whose work harks back to the science, technology and aesthetics of the Victorian steam era.[1] Steampunk re-evaluates the historical impact of industry in the nineteenth century, rendering the Victorian period relevant to the present. Understanding the complicated relationship between the story (literature, art, film, etc.) and the spectacle (subculture) is essential to understanding the potentially uncertain claims of steampunk to be participating in contemporary counterculture. Contemporary subcultures are often supposed to be radical, but we need to interrogate this position and steampunk needs to have this perspective challenged. This is a genre that has its complexities and its problems, but it needs to be properly, academically problematized. To evaluate the contradictions and complexities of steampunk, this monograph attempts a rare feat: it pursues a conversation between steampunk as literary and artistic genre and steampunk as subculture. Sometimes, as we will see, that conversation unfolds within the tangled life stories of individuals such as novelist and subcultural icon, Emilie Autumn. The subculture's claim to subversion can cause friction and tension between different elements. One of the distinctive features of steampunk is that it has found a unique way of turning the story or the artwork of steampunk *as genre* into the lived spectacle of steampunk *as subculture.* Steampunk develops latently conservative strands, woven into the complex and often radical countercultural statements it offers at first sight. In this analysis, we need to think about the role of Empire, specifically in relation to masculinity, as this book will explore at length.

It is also the case that steampunk is deeply self-referential and ironic, with the potential for that irony subverting as well as reinforcing classic models of masculine and feminine, sexuality and performance. As a movement that looks backwards even as it looks forwards, it is worthwhile thinking about Imelda Whelehan's caveat about nostalgia:

It is my belief that we have passed into an era of 'retrosexism' – nostalgia for a lost, uncomplicated past peopled by 'real' women and humorously cheeky chappies, where the battle of the sexes is mostly fondly remembered as being played out as if in a situation comedy … Such retrospective envisioning offers a dialogue between the past and the present and is symptomatic of a real fear about a future where male hegemony might be more comprehensively and effectively attacked than has so far been the case.[2]

This dialogue between the past and the present can be identified with some of the more conservative models of steampunk gender, a reimagined time when men were men and women were women. However, no subculture is monolithic, and it is clear from the analysis in the following pages that a thread of contestation regarding gender stereotypes also runs through much steampunk practice.

The material covered in this book is not intended as a comprehensive analysis of steampunk. Rather, it takes key aspects from literature and various forms of media (film, music, art, popular culture) in order to provide a foundation for the critical study of steampunk. Foundational texts such as those by authors like K. W. Jeter (*Infernal Devices, Morlock Night*) William Gibson and Bruce Sterling (*The Difference Engine*) and a host of others (China Miéville, Neil Stephenson, Robert Rankin) have started to attract critical discussion, so my focus here is on work which might resist the privileging of 'hardcore' steampunk and science fiction texts. This is one of the justifications behind the discussion of graphic novels, 'zines, popular music and romances, rather than the traditional sci-fi novel. Whilst this may suggest a diminution of the 'purity' of the subculture, it is important to think about how popular culture intersects with steampunk and how ideas of authenticity are questioned and interrogated. As there have been so few book-length studies of the form, and even less engagement with how gender and sexuality intersect with steampunk, this book represents one of the first of its kind, and hopefully, not the last, in

addressing steampunk from the theoretical perspective of gender. Notable academic studies of steampunk include Roger Whitson's *Steampunk and Nineteenth-Century Digital Humanities: Literary Retrofuturisms, Media Archaeologies, Alternative Histories* (2017), which addresses the material and digital aspects of steampunk culture, with the broader objective of thinking about the rise in nineteenth-century online resources. There have been several edited collections relating to steampunk, as well as coverage in journal articles. For instance, Rachel A. Bowser and Brian Croxall's *Like Clockwork: Steampunk Pasts, Presents and Futures* (2016) covers a number of topics, including steampunk and disability, race and national identity, and different genres such as the graphic novel form, as well as more conventional literary texts. Julie Anne Taddeo and Cynthia J. Miller's *Steaming into a Victorian Future: A Steampunk Anthology* (2013) addresses fashion, romance and erotica, consumerism and subculture, art and design and the role of exhibition. However, none of these texts represent a concerted attempt to engage with the issue of gender representation in the steampunk subculture. Notably this book is also not a sociological study of the steampunk community, though it does consider steampunk iconography and textual/visual practice as manifested within the subculture. The study of steampunk conventions and online forums would be a worthy study in its own right, but this is beyond the remit of the current book. Rather, textual and visual manifestations of the subculture are addressed in this study. For instance, *The Steampunk Magazine* is a publication which can be evaluated as a text written by the community, speaking to (and for) the subculture. In its reviews, articles and illustrations, it offers one definition of the subculture. Alternative definitions or contestations, as well as modes of critique from within the subculture, such as those by artists (Doctor Geof), ultimately point to the problem of demarcation. The nuances of defining steampunk, or what particular texts might be considered steampunk (especially in

addressing figures which participate in several subcultures, such as Emilie Autumn or the Neo-Victorian artwork of Nick Simpson), are therefore multifarious and highly contested. As with all subcultures, it is not an uncomplicated site, and any definition, including in this book, is by necessity partial and provisional.

As with all subcultures, one of the major issues is that of authenticity. Such debates can relate closely to Sarah Thornton's theory of subcultural capital, which can be *objectified* or *embodied*.[3] Being 'in the know' and owning the 'right' books, music or clothing indicate membership of a particular subculture, and for Thornton, is closely correlated with media consumption. She notes that the media is 'a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge. In other words, the difference between being *in* or *out of* fashion, high or low in subcultural capital, correlates in complex ways with degrees of media coverage, creation and exposure'.[4] It is for this reason that the current study has selected material from popular culture, from within the subculture and from the margins of that culture in order to understand better the various definitions of steampunk.

Steampunk texts and motifs

The major objective of steampunk is rewriting history from the vantage point of today (so steam power is an everyday part of society, and the internal combustion engine has never been made), and time is anachronistic or characters are chronologically displaced, whilst science fiction motifs are common. Often (but not always), writers are influenced by early science fiction and gothic writers, such as H. G. Wells, Bram Stoker, Mary Shelley and Jules Verne. In imagining alternative worlds, practitioners often employ intertextuality, self-conscious referentiality and parody: for instance, the trope of the

mad inventor, derived from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and developed by others such as H. G. Wells in *The Time Machine* (1895), is referenced extensively throughout the genre.[5] Steampunk as a subculture is therefore unusual, as it originated as a literary form, whereas many others, such as goth or punk, emerged as music styles.[6] The author K. W. Jeter is credited with coining the word: in a 1987 letter to science fiction magazine *Locus*, Jeter described his novel *Morlock Night* (1979) as 'gonzo-historical' and suggested the genre, which he suspected would be the next big thing, might be called something like 'steampunk' – as a comedic reference to a variant on 'cyberpunk'. From this, there has been an explosion of novels broadly situated within the steampunk aesthetic: K. W. Jeter's *Infernal Devices* (1987), William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (1990), James P. Blaylock's *Langdon St. Ives* book series (1986–2015), Tim Power's *The Anubis Gates* (1983) as well as a wealth of other fiction too numerous to be listed here.[7] Crucially, Mike Perschon has observed that the genealogies of steampunk are somewhat flexible and that the message in these early works are not necessarily always countercultural.[8] Whilst I struggle to subscribe to his distinctions between 'political' and 'pulp' (popular fiction also has a political message, however implied or submerged), his complication of the steampunk's literary lineage is a useful starting point.

In steampunk, classic images and narratives include dirigibles, clockwork, mad scientists, Victorian technology developed to an anachronistic degree, adventure narratives and stereotypes of nineteenth-century behavioural codes, including such oddities as tea drinking and duelling. These are fetishized, interrogated and celebrated. Literary characters, like Sherlock Holmes and Mina Harker, as well as historical figures, are borrowed, reconfigured and rewritten. For instance, the mathematician Ada Lovelace, whose father was Lord Byron and whose work with Charles Babbage on calculating machines has only recently gained popular currency, features in

much steampunk literature and cosplay or character performances, as does Queen Victoria, and more broadly, the character of the female adventurer.

In thinking about the links between steampunk, gender and related topics like Neo-Victorianism, we might note that in many instances in the popular imagination at least, Victorian society is seen to be a time of manners, civility and elegance. Neo-Victorian commentators frequently register some caution in the popular appropriation of the Victorian, suggesting our immersion in the nineteenth century is not without idealization or simplification, and this is why the current book uses a Neo-Victorian lens to read these cultural texts. Kate Mitchell observes there is

> the issue of what is involved in this re-creation of history, what it means to fashion the past for consumption in the present. The issue turns on upon the question of whether history is equated, in fiction, with superficial detail; an accumulation of references to clothing, furniture, décor and the like, that produces the past in terms of its objects, as a series of clichés.[9]

Nostalgic desire, the attempt to replicate a prior period of history, is quite plainly a problem in replicating the popular idea of the Victorian period as a time when men were men and women were women. Ideologically and historically, this is a fiction, but there is also the security and stability that such (invented) paradigms invoke, carefully disregarding the many social problems of the period. Women of course did not have the vote and could not own property until the Married Woman's Property Act in 1870 (widows and single women could own property). England in such discourses is constructed as a place of stable values: the Empire and scramble for colonies signified great power across the globe, and the class system ensured everyone had a designated place in the economy. It was also a time of large-scale industrial development (Brunel and the

development of the modern steam train is but one example). During the Industrial Revolution, steam gradually replaced water or man to power engines and enabled travel as well as greater and more efficient industrialization. It also meant the rise of capitalism and commodity culture, and exploitation on a scale never seen before. Following the Great Exhibition of 1851, scientific and engineering inventions promised a quality of life hitherto unimaginable. However, how does such an account accurately represent the darker side of Victorian culture (Empire, suppression of women, class dynamics, poverty)? These issues are central to the material in this book: steampunk frequently faces charges of replicating colonial paradigms without any sense of critique: 'The visual vocabulary of imperialism that dominates steampunk texts and culture (modified pith helmets, military uniforms and weaponry, maps, the gear and trappings of space and terrestrial exploration, Asian(-inspired) materials and costuming) and a certain position toward the Victorian that leaves in place orientalist structures and understandings of "the East" has prompted a re-examination of the steampunk archive.'[10] Part of the problem is the potentially conservative nature of any process which relates to nostalgia. Ryan Trimm notes that '*heritage* can operate in post-war Britain as cultural gatekeeping, a selective nostalgia editing out contemporary multiculturalism'.[11] Steampunk has addressed this concern at several junctures: Diana M. Pho's and Jaymee Goh's writing on this subject represents an important critical intervention, and there are many subgenres devoted to this area, such as silkpunk and afrofuturism.[12] There are various instances in steampunk where artists and practitioners attempt to challenge or deconstruct an imperial narrative (as well as other related hegemonic discourses such as patriarchy). We can point to the ways in which contemporary writers have taken all the trappings and trimmings of the nineteenth century (manners, social mores, fashions, sensibilities), but also added to these suppressed or devalued narratives. Whether the objective

to rethink Victorian social conventions (of gender, Empire, science, technology) is always successful is quite another matter.

Steampunk and the political context

The 1980s as the evolutionary moment for steampunk is crucial, as recovering 'Victorian values' was foundational to Margaret Thatcher's policies in that decade and was directly referenced in the run-up to the 1983 election.[13] However, as Raphael Samuel has commented, Thatcher's '"Victorian" seems to have been an interchangeable term for the traditional and the old-fashioned, though when the occasion demanded she was not averse to using it in a pejorative sense'.[14] Thatcher railed against a nostalgia for the Industrial Revolution and was entirely unsentimental about some of the great benefits of the period: whilst she cited Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill and consistently voted to restore hanging, she also celebrated high-tech advancement in industry, whilst at the same time rejecting other Victorian ideas, such as paternalism (in central government at least) and philanthropy. This celebration of the sleek high-tech is very much in opposition to much of steampunk's rusty aesthetic. Martin Danahay asserts steampunk encapsulates the fear 'that in a post-industrial society essential human values are threatened by digital technologies and the intensification of commodification in all aspects of life thanks to computer-mediated networks and virtual worlds'.[15] Thatcher's version of the Victorian invoked 'the Puritan work ethic', and others in her party, such as Rhodes Boyson, interpreted her rallying cry as a 'return to strictness'.[16] Part of this context was related to moral anxiety and the notion that 'Britain was becoming ungovernable, in Mrs Thatcher's words, "a decadent, undisciplined society"'.[17] The agitation of feminist protests, the AIDS epidemic, the increase in workers' rights, unionization, multiculturalism, the visibility of

sexual minorities and a fear of welfare claimants as a financial liability contributed to the idea of moral panic, and relatedly, the need for 'Victorian values'. It is worth noting that a related trajectory was discernible in the United States and the Reagan administration, with which Thatcher's government enjoyed a special relationship: 'Like the small town America of Mr Reagan's rhetoric – God-fearing, paternalistic, patriotic – Mrs. Thatcher's Victorian Britain is inhabited by a people living in a state of innocent simplicity … small businesses and family firms. Work is accorded dignity, achievement rewarded rather than taxed.'[18] Thatcher's Victorian values were based in conventional morality: puritan, old-fashioned, celebrating self-made economic success and personal accountability. Despite being Britain's first female Prime Minister, her reflection on the past is grounded in mythology, or at the very least, a partial version of what the Victorians represented.

I am not saying steampunk and political Conservatism can be conflated: in many instances, political resistance to this model is part of steampunk activity, whilst at the same time emerging in the same chronological moment. Steampunk can be satirized to deflate these very conservative values. For instance, *The Daily Mash* ran a short piece in January 2018 which satirized Jacob Rees-Mogg's pro-Brexit, right-wing values as a steampunk rebellion:

> Rees-Mogg has outlined plans for a post-Brexit Britain of brass automatons, clockwork cars and steam-powered internet.
>
> He said: 'With myself at the helm, we will forge a brave new nation of valves and pumps, of smoked-glass goggles and Tesla coils, of transatlantic tunnels and invincible British airships darkening European skies.
>
> 'Somewhere around 1900, our birthright as a nation was snatched from us. I propose to reset the calendar and do the last hundred years or so properly, with parliament returned to its advisory role and the monarch in absolute power.

'Don't you want your sons to be the first to wear top hats on Mars? Your daughters waited on by a house-robot named Stevens who contains a fully-functioning pipe organ capable of playing eight different hymns?'

Political commentator Eleanor Shaw said: 'This is easily the most coherent vision of post-Brexit Britain we've heard so far.'[19]

Brexit and right-wing rhetoric is certainly a source of steampunk satire, as we will see in Chapter 2. More generally, steampunk's political ambiguity, which looks to the past as well as the future, can speak to today's political concerns, reflecting on the Victorian moment as a period of manners which need to be recovered. This seems part of the more general cultural landscape out of which both steampunk and Thatcher's 'Victorian values' emerged: 'Victorian Britain was constituted as a kind of reverse image of the present, exemplifying by its stability and strength everything that we are not. The past here occupies an allegorical rather than temporal space. It is a testimony to the decline in manners and morals, a mirror to our failings, a measure of absence.'[20] That steampunk design revisits the nineteenth century might also find a reflection in the 1980s, which revived 'period' interiors: Laura Ashley might be a prime example here, whilst Victorian heritage and museums of industry gained greater prominence. It seems possible that the vested interest in the nineteenth century which Thatcher vocalized is part of a great historical moment reflecting upon the Victorians in social life, politics, art and culture, and that steampunk is a part of this process.

A Neo-Victorian subculture?

Steampunk has a number of affinities with the critical practice of Neo-Victorianism, but it is important to acknowledge it has a very different literary lineage and they are not synonymous. As we unlock

the complex way in which steampunk can subvert but sometimes reinforce cultural norms and the nostalgia for older cultures, the relationship between steampunk and Neo-Victorianism needs to be analysed more deeply. Steampunk locates itself, on one level, within some of the tropes outlined within the Neo-Victorian project; in other ways it challenges those tropes. Neo-Victorianism allows for a liminal space in which the Victorian and the contemporary are in constant dialogue, and it is this relationship, founded on continuities, (in) consistencies, tensions and influences, which informs the approach to steampunk found in this book. The best way of approaching steampunk and its relationship to Neo-Victorianism is to use the Neo-Victorian critical lens as a means of reading steampunk material. Elizabeth Ho comments that 'many steampunk authors and participants express their belonging to steampunk through technology … To forget the "technology level" and focus only on "the Victorian" … is to do violence to the genre'.[21] It is not simply the recovery of the Victorian but rather a playful approach to historical science and technology. It is entirely possible for a cultural product to be Neo-Victorian, but not steampunk. Despite this, Neo-Victorianism provides a useful critical framework with which to approach this material. The standard definition of Neo-Victorianism often vaunted by critics is from Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's 2010 study *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century:* 'Texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians.*'[22] This definition seems to privilege a particular type of research into culture (they detail the importance of metafiction, postmodernism and metahistoricism), and several critics, including Heilmann and Llewellyn themselves, have widened this definition: 'We have become increasingly alert to the international and global spheres in which the term "neo-Victorianism" is now deployed, or locations and moments in which, to us, there may be trace elements

of potential engagement with the concepts behind neo-Victorianism as a larger global framework for discourses around nostalgia, heritage and cultural memory.'[23] Helen Davies has remarked that 'it is worth acknowledging that the temporal and geographical reach of "neo-Victorianism" is neither fixed nor self-evident.'[24] She argues that we have constructed these historical categories and that there is much more fluidity in historical boundaries than we might acknowledge. Perhaps for this reason, many steampunks have a flexible approach to Victorianism. They might borrow from the early twentieth century (as in the case of Doctor Geof and the First World War) or from early nineteenth-century narratives which predate Queen Victoria's accession to the throne in 1837 (Ada Lovelace was born in 1815, for instance). Cora Kaplan's definition of the Neo-Victorian is also more open-ended (though she prefers the term 'Victoriana'). She has noted that '"Victoriana" might have narrowly meant the collectible remnants of material culture in the corner antique shop, but by the late 1970s its reference had widened to embrace a complementary miscellany of evocations and recyclings of the nineteenth-century, a constellation of images which became markers for particular moments of contemporary style and culture.'[25] In many ways, with its focus on material culture, and its understanding of cultural borrowing as a 'miscellany', this might be the most useful definition of Neo-Victorianism to apply to steampunk. Steampunk garners influences from the Victorian period in fashion: top hats, bustles, corsets, frock coats, but subjects these to modern interpretation – the skirts, for instance, are often too short for historical costume. It employs literary parodies and postmodern pastiches, whilst celebrating or offering a critique of the Victorian moment and the present day. The steampunk approach to the nineteenth century is therefore self-conscious in its anachronism and ahistoricism (or combination of different historical themes and tropes), with subgenres such as dieselpunk marking a more twentieth-century aesthetic, whilst others may deploy motifs

from the long nineteenth century, rather than focusing exclusively on Queen Victoria's reign (1837–1901). Whilst Queen Victoria's iconic status in steampunk is noteworthy, equally important is the acknowledgement that her prominence is very much an Anglo-centric experience of history, and other cultures, even in Europe, will have different historical touchstones: many international steampunks, in the United States, Europe or Asia, will present their material differently.

Subculture or pop culture?

Steampunk is also a subculture which is demonstrable in a number of ways: music (bands such as The Men That Will Not Be Blamed for Nothing, Professor Elemental and Ghostfire in the UK, Abney Park, Steam Powered Giraffe, or SPG, and Unwoman in the United States); magazine culture (*The Steampunk Magazine, The Steampunk Literary Review*); films (*Steamboy, Hugo, Adele Blanc Sec*); art (Datamancer, James Richardson Brown, Doctor Geof) and fashion (where we might think about the ubiquity of the corset). In recent years, several exhibitions either have been dedicated to steampunk or have included steampunk elements alongside a broader Neo-Victorian brief: the first of these was held at the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford (2009–2010), whilst a smaller exhibition was hosted by Kew Bridge Steam Museum, London (2011). The Guildhall Art Gallery, London, exhibited 'Victoriana, The Art of Revival' (2013), and 'Longitude Punk'd' was held at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich (April 2014–January 2015). Further north, Discovery Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne, showcased 'Fabricating Histories: An Alternative 19th Century' in 2016–2017. Each of these examples suggests not only the emergence of steampunk in terms of arts and craft but the ways in which the form blurs distinctions between high art, science and the craft movement:

'The "punk" is an important reference to an outsider attitude. In steampunk, this attitude manifests itself in the form of the lone wolf artist, the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) craftsman, and the amateur engineer, who are not beholden to any contemporary style or ideology.'[26] In many ways, this notion of punk coincides with Hebdige's notion of subculture as *bricolage:* 'Basic elements can be used in a variety of improvised combinations to generate new meanings within them.'[27] As a caveat, Hebdige is addressing working-class subcultures and theorizing *bricolage* through Levi-Strauss's argument in *The Savage Mind* (1962). Whilst beyond the scope of this book, it is worth noting that steampunk is often (not always) a middle-class phenomenon. It requires disposable income and leisure time for participation. That said, *bricolage* as a 'theft' or adaptation of prior discourses and sartorial styles is a hallmark of steampunk production.

Steampunk artists often take something from our modern-day culture, such as the computer, and retrofit it or imagine its aesthetic value when invested with nineteenth-century images. A steampunk computer may be fitted with an old typewriter keyboard for an antiquated look. Perhaps the most important example of this work is Datamancer (Richard Nagy), whose website explains: 'The idea was to build a full computer station from every significant artistic decade in history. From Art Deco, to Victorian, and even back to Gothic design. It started with a Victorian style brass keyboard … which pioneered the idea of typewriter key caps on a modern keyboard.'[28] This combination of modern utility with historical style is a hallmark of steampunk design. Items such as USB sticks are souped up to reflect a Victorian sensibility. These are practical everyday objects, converted to a steampunk aesthetic: wood, brass, cogs, the inner working of machines. Relatedly, Linda Hutcheon has noted that 'as we approach the millennium, nostalgia may be particularly appealing as a possible escape from what Lee Quinby calls "technological apocalypse." If the future is cyberspace, then what better way to

soothe the techno-peasant anxieties than to yearn for a Mont Blanc fountain pen?'[29] What is particularly noteworthy about steampunk is how far it complicates this opposition between progress and reactionary nostalgia. Whilst the aesthetics of steampunk look to an (idealized) science fiction past as well as an alternative future, more broadly, the marketing of arts and crafts in steampunk is dependent upon modern technology, as is the way in which the subculture has evolved as an online network. Many steampunked items are custom-made and marketed through the possibilities allowed by Web 2.0 sites such as Etsy's craft community, promoting as it does an international network of small businesses and collective engagement:

> Web 2.0, as an approach to the web, is about harnessing the collective abilities of the members of an online network, to make an especially powerful resource or service. But, thinking beyond the Web, it may also be valuable to consider Web 2.0 as a metaphor, for any collective activity which is enabled by people's passions and becomes something greater than the sum of its parts.[30]

Thus part of the idea of collectivity and subculture in steampunk is communicated via very modern technology, whereas prior subcultures, such as punk or goth, originally had to rely on analogue methods. Steampunk imagery and photography are visible on sites such as Instagram, Pinterest and Tumblr, whilst eBay represents one example of steampunk shopping online. However, such a neat binary between analogue and digital is complicated by such developments as the detective drama/comedy *Victoriocity* (2017), a podcast set in an alternative 'Greater London'.[31] Whilst the show explores typical issues as the emancipation of women (in the first episode, our heroine, Clara, has an argument with her mother about undertaking remunerative employment), clockwork invention, the industrial cityscape and its inherent social problems, the show is also noteworthy because podcasts involve listening – typically associated with analogue

technologies like radio. At the same time, however, podcasts are emphatically modern, being launched on platforms like iTunes and available for listening via mobile phone.

The emphasis on art and craft has also prompted a number of publications influenced by the community's DIY ethos. Sarah Skeate and Nicola Tedman's *Steampunk Softies* (2011) is one such example among many: plush toy designs (with individual narratives) are provided for readers to make for themselves: 'Each has his or her part to play in the past-that-never-was that is the essence of steampunk.'[32] These include 'Charity Storm', an aviatrix, and 'Minerva Dupine', a detective, each revealing the possibilities for female characters in the steampunk craft movement. The revival of retro baking and groups affiliated to the Women's Institute such as 'Buns and Roses' have also influenced steampunk in the emergence of recipe books.[33] For instance, *Steampunk Tea Party* has a wide range of jams, cakes and decorative food themed around the subculture. However, and perhaps surprisingly, the recipe book features vintage-style photography in which men and women (of different ethnicities) delight in the ceremony of afternoon tea, although the stories accompanying the menu are gendered in more traditional terms.[34]

The notion of 'punk' is also one of the most discernible ways that steampunk emerges as a subculture. Dick Hebdige, writing in the 1970s, has identified subcultural style as 'intentional communication'. He explains, '[i]t stands apart – a visible construction, a loaded choice. It directs attention to itself; it gives itself to be read. This is what distinguishes the visual ensembles of spectacular subcultures from those favoured in the surrounding culture(s). They are *obviously* fabricated … They *display* their own codes.'[35] Whilst Hebdige has been heavily revised among subcultural theorists, his idea of a 'spectacular subculture' is relevant to any discussion of steampunk. There is a focus on visual signifiers, especially in the sartorial style which comprises steampunk subculture. This notion of display is central to steampunk

ideas of belonging: whether it is expressed through top hats, bustles, corsets, military weaponry or many other examples of the aesthetic, the steampunk participant registers their affiliation to the subculture through style. This model has been rendered more complex by various theories of postmodern elective identities in subcultures, and this will be discussed in more detail with reference to Emilie Autumn, who constructs her persona through several different subcultural styles (see Chapter 3).

The idea of spectacle also influences many steampunk gatherings and festivals. These are international, ranging from Steamathon in Las Vegas, the Steampunk World's Fair in New Jersey (United States), markets in Leeds and Haworth (UK), steampunk fringe events and bands at Goth festivals such as Wave Gotick Treffen in Leipzig (Germany), Whitby Goth Weekend (UK) with a steampunk weekend in Whitby in July, 'A Splendid Day Out' in the seaside town of Morecambe, usually in October, and perhaps most notably, the Asylum Steampunk Festival in Lincoln (UK) which began in 2009. As referenced earlier, in 2011, the Asylum featured an Empire Ball, and also included a costume parade, with the objective in terms of sartorial style gesturing towards inclusivity, combined with quite clear distinctions between the festival and everyday society:

> We would suggest that people do try to be as steampunk as they feel happy with however since 'normal' may feel distinctly out of place … If someone is new to steampunk and only has regular street clothes this is not a problem at all. (Jeans and t-shirts are usually very very noticeable in their absence however.) If you are not going to dress 'steampunk' may we gently suggest that Friday night and Saturday day you wear whatever you do normally and for the Ball think of it as if you were invited to your eccentric cousin's wedding.[36]

Indeed, in January 2013, Margi Murphy in *The Independent* heralded steampunk as 'Britain's latest fashion craze'.[37] There is a steampunk bar