

Hauntological Aspects of Steampunk Philosophy

Normunds Kozlovs¹, Ilva Skulte²

Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia

¹ Department of Doctoral Studies

² Department of Communication Studies

Introduction. In the post-digital era, the question is raised of what philosophical background can be used to better interpret developing strategies and tactics transforming technologies. The use of low-tech technologies can be found in the aesthetic paradigm of steampunk – subculture within arts and design.

Aim, Materials and Methods. The main aim of the study was to demonstrate how steampunk's aesthetic ideology contribute to philosophical grounds of technological (de)modernization and hauntology as revitalizing of somehow ghostly retro-futurism of high modernity. Materials include steampunk artifacts and the following methods were used: philosophical and semiotic analysis.

Results. In the scholarly literature the term hauntology was introduced via the passage of "Specters of Marx" by J. Derrida – "to describe a concern with apparitions, visions, and representations that mediate the sensuous and the non-sensuous, visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, reality and not-yet-reality, being and non-being." Steampunk refers to hauntology as pro-active philosophy of Spiritism – one within various traditions of retro-futurism while hauntology itself remains nostalgic retrospection of undead futures represented by the figure of ghost.

Media technologies can be used to extend a man's perceptual abilities and note, record and preserve traces of haunted. In the digital era M. Fisher, a hauntology expert, writes talking about some movie images that haunted him since childhood: "In conditions of digital recall, loss is itself lost". There is a wish to have it back in the form of technological time and history of technology. Where a technology is haunted by the idea of historical time and lifespan and bears direct imprints of those outside the lifetime. This oscillation between life and death, history and future is the fascination of the lost "loss" in culture. Therefore, steampunk is preoccupied with technological (and in the design – material) stains of time as "rat-bike" motor-bikers' movement of intentional aging the exterior of mechanisms.

Conclusions. Steampunk is not merely retro-Victorian style design of gadget aesthetics. First of all, it is ideological renaissance of humanistic ideals of modernity. There is correspondence of Steampunk ideology with J. Habermas's notion of "modernity as incomplete project" and intentional direction back to the steam-engine era of humanistic faith of unified history and technological advancement for global civilization progress. At the same time, there is a lack of method for such return that resembles J. Baudrillard's pessimistic critique of contemporary technological development loosing its human scale and breaking away from reality into "simulacrum".