STEEL CORSETS AND OCULAR PROTECTION: THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF STEAMPUNK THROUGH FASHION

by

Samantha Mall Viksnins
A Thesis
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of
Master of Arts
History of Decorative Arts

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Steel Corsets and Ocular Protection: The Democratization of Steampunk through Fashion

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all those who take a chance at a second career.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many steampunks, makers/tinkerers, designers, and artists who submitted to my constant stream of questions. I would also like to thank relatives, friends and supporters who sent me various steampunk related information. As for my dog, Taxi, you are a disappointment! I assigned this task to you six months ago and not once did you raise a paw to help write this thesis.
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ABSTRACT

STEEL CORSETS AND OCULAR PROTECTION: THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF STEAMPUNK THROUGH FASHION

Samantha Mall Viksnins, M.A.

George Mason University, 2015

Thesis Director: Dr. Heidi Nasstrom Evans

This thesis analyzes the evolution of Steampunk subculture in the past fifteen years. By examining Steampunk ethos in relation to other subcultures and consumerism it becomes evident that sartorial form is the channel through which the distinct Steampunk design vocabulary has permeated the larger culture.
INTRODUCTION

“I swear, if one more person tries to tell me the Prada Fall 2012[fig.1] Menswear collection is steampunk I will punch them in the face.”

- The Numi@OhThatNumi¹

None of us is immune from agitation to the point of being desirous of pummeling someone, but rarely will an exclamation from a complete stranger, on perhaps a completely unfamiliar topic, convey the sentiment as strongly as Numi Prasarn did in her May 11, 2013, tweet. A multi-media artist, producer, and writer – self-described as obsessed with fashion theory² – Prasarn’s tweet certainly caught the attention of, if not fashionistas, then certainly steampunks. Those most familiar with the luxury fashion house Prada as a mainstay of red carpet events may have been curious about a possibly punk inspired collection. Steampunks – as members of the science fiction (“sci-fi”) subculture Steampunk are called – including Jake von Slatt, a preeminent steampunk maker, reacted entirely differently and were curious about a possibly Victorian inspired collection. What precisely caused Prasarn’s grievance with Steampunk? Was there a perceived line, one not to be crossed, between high fashion and subculture fashion or was

Prasarn’s tweet merely a reaction to an over-saturation of Steampunk subculture in popular culture? For Prasarn’s tweet to stir the imagination – depending on the reader’s knowledge of fashion and sci-fi subcultures – to envision two entirely disparate design aesthetics raises many conflicting notions about fashion, subcultures and most importantly, Steampunk. Such queries, first and foremost, necessitate an introduction to Steampunk and the aesthetic vocabulary of this subculture.

![Figure 1: Prada. Fall/Winter 2012 Campaign.](http://www.prada.com/en/advertising-campaign-fw12/man-info)

Alternatively described as sci-fi, fantasy, and retro-futurism – a re-imagining of the past with futuristic technology – there is a distinct lexicon and design vocabulary that arises from the fictional writings, costumes and objects of Steampunk. These consist mainly of Victorian/Edwardian (see appendix B) era inspired settings, clothing, steam-powered machines, and a skeletal technology that shows the inner workings – usually
gears and cogs – of Steampunk objects (fig. 2). The Steampunk literary genre, the plots for which are most often set in nineteenth-century London or the American Wild West, developed perhaps as early as the 1950’s, but came fully into its own during the 1970’s. More recently, Steampunk has moved beyond its literary roots to a lifestyle that encompasses music, film, art, comics, clothing, jewelry, home furnishings, and do-it-yourself (“DIY”) crafts. Steampunk has become, if not an outright lifestyle choice, then certainly a state of mind. This examination of American Steampunk focuses specifically on fashion as the nexus for the above listed aspects of the subculture. Chapter one analyzes the countercultural characteristics of Steampunk. Chapter two presents the archetypal Steampunk characters and development of the Steampunk aesthetic through visual media. Chapter two also considers various critiques of the subculture in an historical and cultural context. Chapter three examines the appropriation of Steampunk and how the design aesthetic has permeated the larger culture.
Steampunks and casual observers are hard pressed to define what constitutes Steampunk, but it doesn’t stop any of them from trying. One particularly well thought-out, and certainly mathematically inspired, definition of Steampunk was provided by sci-fi author Jeff VanderMeer:

STEAMPUNK = Mad Scientist Inventor [invention (steam x airship or metal man / baroque stylings) x (pseudo) Victorian setting] + progressive or reactionary politics x adventure plot.³

Professor of Literature Mike Perschon, better known as Steampunk Scholar, linked three common elements of Steampunk literature: neo-Victorianism, technofantasy and retrofuturism to help define the genre.⁴ Neo-Victorianism “evokes the nineteenth

century,” technofantasy “permits real world elements like steam to produce nuclear energy,” while retrofuturism “is the way *the present* imagines the past seeing the future.”

It is the neo-Victorian element discussed by Perschon that forms the basis for sartorial analysis of Steampunk. Corsets, goggles, bustles, overskirts, frock coats, top hats, pith helmets, parasols, walking sticks and an otherwise multitude of gear-bedecked accessories are the mainstays of Steampunk fashion (fig. 3). Steampunk costumes don’t just evoke the nineteenth century, they instantly put one in the mood for a strong cup of *lapsang souchong* tea served, naturally, with delectable cakes and finger sandwiches.

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Steampunk maker/tinkerer, Jake von Slatt, shares his mechanical designs and fabrications (fig. 4) on his DIY website Steampunk Workshop (“SPWS”) along with commentary by himself and guest authors on topics ranging from literature to art, music, and fashion. When Prasarn’s tweet caught von Slatt’s attention he immediately requested she write an article for SPWS to expound on the subject; he fully expected Numi to fulminate against Steampunk and looked forward to her observations with unrestrained relish (fig. 5). Prasarn’s resultant essay for SPWS on Prada’s Fall 2012 Men’s Collection and its lack of association with Steampunk raises several pertinent points including, once again, the difficulty in defining Steampunk. What does come across clearly in the essay, however, is the visual nature of fashion and how easily it categorizes certain markers of, up until quite recently, an obscure sub-genre of sci-fi. Numi asserts that Prada’s Fall 2012 Menswear Collection is not inspired by Steampunk, and to label it as such amounts to appropriation. “My main complaint is that the collection’s initial message is being devalued and overlooked because of an easily thrown buzzword.”

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6 Prasarn, “Steampunk Stahp!”
7 Prasarn, “Steampunk Stahp!”
Figure 4: 3D Printed Whimhurst Machine
Jake von Slatt

Figure 5: Screenshot The Numi Twitter Account
Source: https://twitter.com/OhThatNumi/status/3333777254648340483.
The Edwardian era inspired collection was unveiled in a show titled ‘Prada Presents: Il Palazzo. A Palace of Role Play’ and in the words of Miuccia Prada it is “a parody of male power.”\(^8\) As Numi correctly notes, the collection is about posturing and using dress to impress a sense of superiority upon both the individual wearing the clothes and those viewing this individual. None of the clothes in the collection were as they seemed. For example the patterns or weaves on shirts and jackets, which from a distance looked like classic hounds tooth or ogival designs, were in fact printed football helmets and handguns (fig. 6). While I concur with Numi that this collection is not wholly Steampunk inspired, it seems unfathomable that within Prada’s entire production process no comparison was drawn to Steampunk. In 2012, Prada was undoubtedly in a mood for tongue-in-cheek retrospectives in both its men’s and women’s collections. Using design inspiration from the twentieth century, Prada created fun and irreverent interpretations of Edwardian clothes and 1950’s hot rod cars (fig. 7). Yet, as I’ll show in chapter three, several high fashion collections incorporated the Victorian aesthetic starting as early as 2007. Whether Prada was inspired by Steampunk or otherwise, the romance of the fin-de-siècle silhouette has been immensely popular in recent years.

The Edwardian aesthetics of Prada’s menswear collection lend themselves so very easily to Steampunk, and to address Prasarn’s second point of contention:

“…that Steampunk doesn’t seem to be aware of where it stands in the grand scheme of things,” I would disagree. Indeed Steampunk is a buzzword easily attached to anything

remotely neo-Victorian, but the retro-futuristic aspect of Steampunk is precisely what makes this Prada collection an ideal metaphor for the empty shell of the British Empire’s power often portrayed in Steampunk literature. There is a philosophy in which the subculture is grounded; it has a speculative aspect – in literature, fashion, and tinkering – that necessitates a DIY approach. These principles of Steampunk inspire individuals to create a personal style pulled together from a variety of sources that may include high fashion collections.

Figure 6: Detail of Prada Men’s F/W 2012 Print (guns)
In the last fifteen years Steampunk has not only gained international popularity in the world of sci-fi – developing beyond literature to a maker/tinkerer movement, one where individuals like von Slatt often redesign modern technology using a Victorian design aesthetic – but its literary roots make it a natural fit for the costume role play (“cosplay”) subculture. Cosplay is more than simple dressing up for a costume party. Cosplayers engage in both casual and formalized activities such as sci-fi conventions (“cons”) where they dress in elaborate costumes of sci-fi characters and enact these roles. Considerable resources, creative and economic, are expended in the creation of these costumes; sci-fi costume designers may expect to use cons as a launching pad for their professional careers. Unlike cosplayers who attend cons and other events dressed as established sci-fi characters, steampunks generally create their own personas or ‘steamsona’ – usually based on the individual’s personal background and interests.
There is considerably more to Steampunk cons than an opportunity for cosplay. Cons and other events that cater specifically to steampunks take place all over the world; in the United States two major annual events include Steampunk World’s Fair in New Jersey and Steampunk Symposium in Ohio. Both of these venues provide significantly more than an opportunity for like-minded individuals to engage in cosplay. Panels, lectures, and workshops are all designed to help writers, makers, and history enthusiasts become more knowledgeable on a number of topics. Steampunk events in other parts of the world aren’t that different, but participants may be more enthusiastic about other aspects of the subculture. For instance in Sweden Live Action Role Play (“LARP”) – an activity where participants act out the fictional character’s actions and not to be confused with historical reenactment – is a major attraction for steampunks. In May 2014, the Steampunk World’s Fair panels included opportunities to discuss the merits of steam power versus aether as a source of fuel for airships in fictional writing, as well as costuming panels that taught how to properly wield parasols and walking sticks – this is especially important for gentlemen since these accessories were affectations. To actually use a walking stick implied a physical handicap. Other panels included DIY instructions on millinery, modifying dress patterns, and quilling – a Renaissance paper art that enjoyed a resurgence as a ladies’ pastime in later centuries. Other workshops included lessons in ballroom dancing and Bartitsu, a form of gentlemen’s martial arts in which

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walking sticks and hats can be applied in aid of self-defense, as popularized in the Sherlock Holmes novels (fig. 8).

Figure 8: Bartitsu

Steampunk’s undefinable nature allows for myriad expressions and interpretations. Costuming is just one such expression, but not only does it permit participants to delve beyond literature and the maker movement to a lifestyle in which anyone can fully engage, or dabble, simply based on the ability to dress the part. It has become the link between the varied aspects of this subculture. Though Steampunk costume is a noteworthy subset of cosplay, it diverges from cosplay as steampunks participate in Steampunk culture outside of cons, incorporating fashion based in the Victorian aesthetic in varied aspects of their lives. And dressing the part may involve
purchasing the full look from Prada, SteampunkEmporium.com, thrift shops, raiding your clothes closet and craft cupboard, or a combination of all.
CHAPTER ONE: GET PUNK OR GO HOME

“Parents, talk to your children about Steampunk.

It’s everywhere these days, isn’t it? Anime, Doctor Who, novel after novel involving clockwork and airships. Young women going about in bustles, for heaven’s sake! But it’s just as easy for kids these day to get impure Steampunk, cut with lesser punk materials.”

-Catherynne M. Valente10

What is Punk about Neo-Victorianism

The nineteenth century is also known as the age of iron and steam, when hulking locomotives and belching factories – harnessing the power of pressurized steam – brought forth an era of unprecedented technological innovation. Steampunk has its roots in a literary genre that channels the sci-fi writings of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, as well as Victorian and Edwardian era Edisonades. The 1868 Edisonade “The Steam Man of the Prairies” (fig. 9) featured a machine:

about ten feet in hight [sic], measuring to the top of the 'stove-pipe hat'...The face was made of iron, painted a black color, with a pair of fearful eves[sic], and a tremendous grinning mouth...The steam chest proper and boiler, were where the chest in a human being is generally supposed to be, extending also into a large knapsack arrangement over the shoulders and back...The legs were quite long, and the step was natural, except when running, at which time, the bolt uprightness in the figure showed different from a human being.11

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With these dime novels that featured ‘mad scientists and crackpot inventors’ and their fantastical adventures serving as inspiration the ‘steam’ in Steampunk is easily appreciated. The term Steampunk itself was coined in 1987 when sci-fi writer K. W. Jeter sent in a copy of a Victorian fantasy novel for review to Locus, a sci-fi magazine. Jeter requested the novel be forwarded to a specific reviewer and facetiously suggested the phrase Steampunk to categorize his literary works, and those of his fellow sci-fi writers, set in or otherwise relating to the late Victorian era (see transcript below).\textsuperscript{12}

Personally, I think Victorian fantasies are going to be the next big thing, as long as we can come up with a fitting collective term for Powers, Baylock and myself. Something based on the appropriate technology of that era: like “steampunks,” perhaps… (Original ellipses)

-- J.W. Jeter

[Thanks for the book! Capsule critique: Morlock Night combines H.G. Wells, Arthurian fantasy, and Victoriana in a strange, entertaining mixture – less antic than Infernal Devices, perhaps, but a clear forerunner. “Steampunks”? I like it… (Original ellipses)

-- F.C. Miller]  

Thus the term Steampunk was born as innocuously as the brief exchange above, yet this still does not explain the ‘punk’ in Steampunk and its ties to Victoriana. The lexeme itself is a play on Cyberpunk, a sci-fi subgenre set in a dystopian future featuring an archetypal marginalized loner standing up to a technologically advanced social order, usually controlled by a megacorporation. With social anxieties related to the Cold War, Artificial Intelligence – stunningly portrayed in the 1982 film, Tron – the Iran hostage crisis (1979-81) and Beirut bombing (1983), and Britain’s Punk scene that highlighted issues of unemployment, class, race, and religion, sci-fi served as an ideal platform for social commentary. Steampunk literature, especially the first-wave produced during the 1970’s and 1980’s by the godfather of Steampunk literature Michael Moorcock, was “intensely progressive, a blistering critique of Victorian Imperialism, and hugely sympathetic to those peoples subjugated by the British.” Jeter, also known for his Cyberpunk literature, merely drew a link between the ideologies of the two sci-fi

subgenres; Steampunk is a mere bon mot “based on the appropriate technology of that era.”

So does this explain the ‘punk’ in Steampunk? When considering the etymology of Steampunk and the 1970’s British working class youth subculture centered around an anti-establishment political ideology, music, fashion, and art scene, the answer is a resounding…no! The protagonists in Steampunk literature are usually scientists, academics, military men, members of the House of Lords, blue stockings, and inventors, in other words members of the middle and upper classes rather than rebels. They often embark on their adventures ‘in service of the Empire’ and even if they come to question the ideals by which the Empire operates, they may not necessarily turn against it. The working class Punks of the 1970’s, on the other hand, took a decisive stand against Crown and Country. However, in the two decades from when Jeter ‘coined’ the term Steampunk, to the time it evolved beyond a literary tradition to encompass a philosophy expressed through music, film, art, and fashion, the ‘punk’ in Steampunk has manifested itself within the ethos of the subculture. Another parallel that demonstrates the punk in Steampunk is the egalitarian acceptance of people from all walks of life including class, race and gender.

Steampunk’s ethos is resistance to a dominant culture but rather than the blatant antagonism of Punk, steampunks choose a more subtle approach. There is precedence for this in the past twenty years as noted by fashion historian, Caroline Evans:

Class, work, leisure, left politics, the whole conceptual framework of resistance seems to have changed out of all recognition in the last 20–30

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16 Letters of Note, “The Birth of Steampunk.”
years, so that the model of resistance in Resistance Through Rituals (Hall and Jefferson 1976) no longer seems viable. But perhaps resistance is more subtle and complex than might be readily apparent by looking at the subcultural “tactics” of ravers in the late 1980s...such as the tactic of making themselves invisible, both through the ordinariness of their bland and baggy fashions, and through the fly-by-night nature of the rave...subcultures only partially “resist through rituals”; they also recreate many of the forms and structures of power of the dominant culture. They “win back” space, and issue challenges, but only in the spectacular field of leisure rather than that of work.\footnote{17}

Much of Evan’s discourse on 1980’s rave culture can easily be modified and adapted to Steampunk. Participants, when not engaging in cosplay, do disappear through their ordinariness. The sepia-toned blouses, shirts, vests, and skirts mixed with other articles of clothing in ivory, burgundy, dark grey, hunter green, and black easily conform to the ‘straight’ styling of everyday life. However Steampunk style doesn’t just offer resistance during leisure activities but in all aspects of daily life. A ruffle edged button up shirt from J Crew paired with black pants and Victorian inspired shoes can just as easily be worn at a Steampunk event as the office.

Like its namesake, Punk, Steampunk subculture is rooted in concepts of anti-establishment. The 1970’s Punk culture, influenced by an eclectic mix of glam rock, soul and reggae music, manufactured a unique visual aesthetic. This Punk aesthetic, based in a DIY philosophy necessitated by economic constraints, “reproduced the entire sartorial history of post-war working class youth cultures in ‘cut up’ form, combining elements which had originally belonged to completely different epochs.”\footnote{18} 

\footnote{17} Caroline Evans, “Dreams That Only Money Can Buy...Or, The Shy Tribe in Flight from Discourse,” \textit{Fashion Theory} 1, no. 2 (1997): 170, \url{http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bloomsbury/jdbc/1997/00000001/00000002/art00004}.

makers/tinkerers reject the “perceived uniformity and insipidness of contemporary consumer culture.” Through DIY application of Victorian design principles to modern technology, steampunks bring the technofantasy element of Steampunk fiction to life, if not in actual working models (fig. 10) then certainly in prototype machines.

For those not necessarily drawn to the politics espoused in Steampunk literature or particularly handy with a soldering iron and band-saw, but still eschewing the ubiquitous choices available at the local shopping emporium, fashion is the means through which they give form to their own unique expression. This expression is more than engaging in cosplay – where many individuals with only “a day-pass” participate dressed in elaborate Victorian costume complete with props such as weapons made from

20 VanderMeer and Chambers, Steampunk Bible, 132.
an amalgamation of foam, copper, leather and a liberal application of bronze spray paint – but incorporates DIY elements or period inspired articles of clothing in their everyday wardrobe. A considerable number of individuals come to the Steampunk community via the fashion, rather than the fiction, avenue. Steampunk author Gail Carriger, like many steampunks, was surprised to find that there was a term to define her taste in clothing:

Long before I discovered Moorcock, when I still thought Jules Verne was destined to remain safely trapped away in the 1800s forever, I wore Steampunk. I proudly donned my Victorian silk blouses and little tweed jodhpurs. I didn’t know there was Steampunk to read, I only thought there was Steampunk to wear.21

Steampunk makers are not unique when it comes to exhibiting the DIY ethic; Steampunk fashion is just as much about DIY ingenuity. Many steampunks create their own steamsona and some even have multiple steamsonas. Steampunks will create a personal history for their steamsonas and elements of these histories are often reflected in their costume choices. As a result, complete costumes cannot simply be purchased but must be, like Punk clothing, pulled together from a variety of clothing and otherwise innocuous objects, often from different eras in history. Diana Pho, an author who uses Steampunk for analysis and reform of colonial-era attitudes towards race and class, has created a steamsona that incorporates her cultural heritage (fig. 11). Ay-leen the Peacemaker, Pho’s steamsona, “has a backstory based on alternative historical Indochina, where China and Japan are superpowers actively competing with European nations for control over Southeast Asia, and that’s how the area becomes a center for multi-cultural

21 VanderMeer and Chambers, Steampunk Bible, 64.
interaction.” Even if a steampunk hasn’t created a steamsona the costumes are a study in DIY resourcefulness and design principles. Consider Carriger’s rather standard Victorian inspired costume, which has been featured in several Steampunk publications (fig 12). At first glance this is a straightforward look, a corset worn with a bustle skirt, though upon closer examination whimsical elements become evident. Even then the physical examination doesn’t shed much light on the actual process by which the costume was created, and only with an explanation from the maker, Carriger, does the viewer become aware of true Steampunk aesthetics:

The top part is a Dark Garden corset I deconstructed (read: tore apart). I then sewed a whole bunch of old metal buttons and beads of different sizes onto the bottom and attached an old metal belt. Along the bust line I attached brass teaspoons from the 1950s I found in the garage…and I used brass paperclips to attach cover buttons down the front. The skirt part is made from two thrift store finds with curtain ruffles attached. Hanging from my belt are some World War II army pouches. The hat is made from a 1960s velvet fez, bent into a new position, and decorated within an inch of its life.23

Figure 11: Ay-leen the Peacemaker
a.k.a. Diana M. Pho, act. 2008
Source: http://www.thesteampunkempire.com/profile/AyleenthePeacemaker
Steampunks seek to bring back the elegance and romance of a well-constructed silhouette in the age of yoga pant inspired trousers (fig. 13). At first glance, dressing in a Victorian inspired manner – while sipping tea and bandying quaint English phrases – hardly signifies rebellion. Yet in a subtle way the rejection of ‘from work to play’ attire emphasizes the desire to break away from the sterility of modern life. A steampunk may be engaged in negotiating a multi-billion dollar merger in the corporate boardroom, but the Steampunk inspired fountain pen (fig. 14) used to sign the contracts will bring about a welcome moment of creativity and unabashed fun.
Subculture or Lifestyle

In endeavoring to define Steampunk, even categorizing it within a particular milieu is difficult for Steampunk pundits. Depending on the authority, timeline of Steampunk history, and/or desire to validate a position, it is variously referred to as popular culture, a movement, subculture, or a lifestyle. Disparity, further adding confusion, can often be found within a single essay. VanderMeer, in his essay
“Measuring the Critical Mass of Steampunk” initially refers to Steampunk as “a way of life and a part of pop culture” but consigns subsequent categorizations of Steampunk to subculture. In determining an appropriate category of Steampunk in relation to cultural studies, I will consider each of these terms individually.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* (“OED”) defines popular culture as “… based on the tastes of ordinary people rather than an educated elite.” This definition of popular culture leads me further down the rabbit hole as I now must define culture. OED’s definition of culture is: “The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively.” Put another way, “the best which has been thought and said in the world.” Whether Steampunk can be considered the best of the best the intellectual world has to offer is outside of the scope of this paper and something I leave for future scholars of Steampunk to determine. Culture critic Raymond Williams, presented three definitions of culture, each progressively more complex in its application. It is the third definition that considers the social implications of culture and explores culture as “a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior…” that, as a definition, most closely aligns with Steampunk.

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What can be surmised is that popular culture is the most well liked and/or recognized aspect of a society’s cultural environment. It quickly becomes evident that Steampunk cannot, as yet, be categorized wholly as popular culture. Steampunk has certainly gained immense popularity in the past fifteen years, but hardly appeals to universal taste. During the course of writing this thesis, I have more often than not had to explain Steampunk to those whom steampunks may at times good-naturedly refer to as “straights.”

While sci-fi, Victoriana and Punk – fully enmeshed in popular culture – need not be explained, Steampunk, which includes some aspect of all the above, remains unfamiliar to most individuals.

It is also not appropriate to categorize Steampunk as a movement since that is defined as “A group of people working together to advance their shared political, social, or artistic ideas.” Steampunks are exceptionally collaborative and inclusive, and many of them, like von Slatt, have their political, social and artistic ideas readily available on blogs and other non-subscription websites, easily accessible by any interested party. Two of the most well-known Steampunk works of art – *Steampunk Treehouse* and *The Golden Mean* (figs. 15 and 16) – are a result of artistic partnerships. But, if someone chooses not to share the ‘how-to’ of a Steampunk object, the community considers them poseurs; the act of withholding basic information violates the egalitarian, open-source spirit of Steampunk.

Yet, one can hardly claim steampunks work together as an organized unit to advance the Steampunk ideology; they simply welcome all those interested in

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engaging with the community without forcing an agenda. This leaves subculture and lifestyle to consider when categorizing Steampunk. These two terms are defined, respectively, as follows: “A cultural group within a larger culture, often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger culture”\(^{32}\) – the notion of a ‘larger culture’ is a fallacy as people engage in several cultures concurrently i.e., an individual of Caribbean descent living in New York City who is a cardiologist and an amateur musician – and “the way in which a person lives.”\(^{33}\) Both of these categorizations fit Steampunk – steampunks may hold beliefs in variance with larger society, such as it exists, and many of them live their lives according to these beliefs. If it is difficult to arrive at a definition for Steampunk, then it is hardly surprising that even cultural categorization poses a challenge.

Early twentieth century subculture studies focused on youth culture and deviant behavior. By the 1970’s, subculture was studied at the junction of youth, music, and fashion, most notably by sociologist Dick Hebdige. The 1970’s studies maintained that
subcultures deliberately set themselves at odds with the normative behavior of the larger society; these included the mods, hippies, and punks. With time many of these theories have come under criticism, most often for their narrow constructs that limited the possibilities to expand and encompass changing notions of cultural fragmentation.\textsuperscript{34} Others contend that subculture “has arguably become little more than a convenient ‘catch-all’ term for any aspect of social life in which young people, style and music intersect.”\textsuperscript{35} In considering increased “fluidity of youth cultural memberships” some theorists have come to use the term lifestyle:

as a more accurate theoretical model through which to address and interpret the shifting identity politics and stylistic association of contemporary youth. The concept of lifestyle focuses on the issue of consumer creativity, acknowledging the ways in which commodities function as cultural resources…whose meanings are generated at the level of everyday through inscription of collective meanings.\textsuperscript{36}

With the new outlook and methodology to study subculture, and substitution of the term lifestyle, it would suffice that Steampunk is neither one nor the other, or even both, but can interchangeably be categorized as either. Steampunk also serves as a case study for additional criticisms of subculture theory. One point of view holds that “subcultures are not homogeneous groups with clearly bounded memberships…but are to be understood as useful ways of representing processes of collaborative social action, and characterizing the activities of identified groups.” Another observation is “the

\textsuperscript{34} Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris. \textit{After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture} (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2.
\textsuperscript{36} Bennett and Kahn-Harris, \textit{After Subculture}, 13.
phenomenon of the subculture members whose participation does not involve the adoption of an all-encompassing lifestyle, but is more like a leisure-time.” There is even the consideration that subcultures no longer just reflect youth, but the mentality of youth.37

Evans rightly questions whether subcultures today are less about class and more about searching for community.38 Steampunk, like many of the subcultures since the 1970’s, has been less about the class struggle than it has been about an individual’s ideals. The average steampunk is middle class, white (in United States and Western Europe), and has the disposable income to participate in this lifestyle (fig. 17). In my research, I have found a variety of individuals participating in the lifestyle. In addition to the expected students, musicians, artists, and writers I regularly met lawyers, accountants, software designers, government administrators, professors, medical professionals, homemakers in other words individuals from all walks of life who regularly participate in the lifestyle. Again and again, what comes across in conversations with steampunks is the sense of community. Steampunks are by no means a closed group and will often engage in several sci-fi subgenres simultaneously. This is seen most clearly in the hybrid characterization of Steampunk style (fig 18). While all of the above hold true for Steampunk, earlier theories and studies of subculture still provide a lens through which we can study this subculture/lifestyle.

37 Bennett and Kahn-Harris, After Subculture, 23-31.
The Ethos of Steampunk

It is William’s third definition of culture that serves as a springboard for Hebdige’s theory of subculture. In his seminal work, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige uses Punk as a case study to consider the style of a subculture. Many of the
observations made by Hebdige relate directly to Steampunk. In this section I’ll present where the Punk ethos is self-evident in Steampunk, and where the two diverge. Punk by its very nature as a subculture is in an innate opposition between two groups, most often between the parent and youth cultures; it is the very definition of a disturbance in societal order. Steampunks also put themselves in opposition to normative society but unlike Punk, steampunks don’t repudiate society. They seek to comprehend the underlying mechanisms of what makes people and technology ‘tick.’ Steampunk makers are especially adept at this, as they follow the Arts and Craft principle of honesty in design. They regularly deconstruct objects to not only explore how something functions, but to allow for the opportunity to appreciate the creativity involved in designing a product; the viewer is once more able to make the connection between form and function (fig. 19).

The most obvious parallel between Punk and Steampunk is the visual style of the two subcultures. Of course Punk was not the first subculture to adopt a distinct visual style and Steampunk will hardly be the last. The teddy-boys in the United Kingdom and rockabillies in the United States, the mods, and hippies, to name a few, who came before the Punks all sported a look that instantly identified them as members of a subculture. There were also many subcultures after the Punks who announced their ‘other’ status through clothing such as hip-hop, grunge and most notably the Goths, whom many consider to be a precursor subculture to Steampunk. Here parallels, can be drawn in that steampunks relate most closely with punks and not just in the DIY spirit of constructing a visual identity and rejecting a plastic society (von Slatt), but also by seeking to disrupt the cycle of Victorian-era classism and racism that continues to be perpetuated today.
Besides her many activities related to Steampunk, Pho maintains a blog that analyzes “steampunk outside of a Western-dominant, Eurocentric framework. All of the steampunkery here focuses on non-Western cultures, underrepresented minorities (Asian / Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, First Nation / indigenous / NDN, Hispanic / Latin@, black / African) and other marginalized groups in Western histories, and the cultural intersection between the West and the non-West.”

![Figure 19: Workshop Telephone](http://steampunkworkshop.com/workshop-telephone/).

In addition to the political rhetoric and music that are instantly identifiable as Punk, so too were certain choices for clothing accessories as they “found ratification in

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39 Beyondvictoriana.com, Mission Statement, Beyond Victoriana (blog), http://beyondvictoriana.com/about/.
an equally eclectic clothing style which produced the same kind of cacophony on the visual level. The whole ensemble, literally safety-pinned together…“*” (fig. 20).

Steampunk has its own unique styling that makes it recognizable to anyone even slightly attuned to the subculture as seen in the case of Prada’s aforementioned collection.

Steampunk style markers have much in common with Punk: gears, for example, are the safety pins of Steampunk style. More often than not they are simply decorative, glued on hats and goggles, sewn onto corsets and coats, made into earrings and cuff links, and otherwise attached and displayed on anything and everything to channel the Steampunk aesthetic (figs. 21 and 22). The many-hued spikey Mohawk signature hairstyles of the punks (fig. 23) translate into elaborate headgear for steampunks, often in the form of a top hat. The ubiquitous black leather jacket sported by most Punks has similarly transposed as bronze colored corsets and vests (fig. 24).

Figure 20: Johnny Lydon a.k.a. Johnny Rotten, b. 1956
Source: https://albumoriented.wordpress.com/tag/johnny-rotten/.

40 Hebdige, Subculture, 26.
Figure 21: Lady Clakington
act. 2010 –

Figure 22: Steampunk Shoes
Reggae music may have offered a political backbone to Punk, and Glam rock lent it literary intellectualism, but as Hebdige notes “British punk bands, generally younger
and more proletarian, remained largely innocent of literature.”  

Likewise, many steampunks are wholly unaware of the literary roots of Steampunk, according to VanderMeer “many of the people who today call themselves Steampunks have not read the literature, taking cues instead from history, visual media, and the original fashionistas who sparked the subculture in the 1990s.”  

This observation ties directly to a significant aspect of Hebdige’s theory of subculture that “the meanings attached to these styles often become redefined once they are commodified and recuperated by the mainstream.”  

Steampunk is no exception and like many youth subcultures has been heavily commoditized – something I’ll explore in detail in Chapter Three. But in the context of the information age, where Punks and the subcultures before them were physically limited – they could only congregate as far as they could easily travel – Steampunk has a greater international presence than some of its predecessors because of the participants’ ability to congregate in the virtual environment.

As VanderMeer notes, steampunks may have come to the community “through music or fashion” rather than fiction, but they stay because of the “DIY activism and sustainable technology.”  

These principles are especially expounded in SteamPunk Magazine, a publication dedicated to the radical ideas inherent in Steampunk of “readdressing the ways that we interact with technology. A way of challenging the assumptions of the industrial revolution.”  

The magazine’s editor and guest writers

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41 Hebdige, Subculture, 27.
42 VanderMeer and Chambers, Steampunk Bible, 9.
44 VanderMeer and Chambers, Steampunk Bible, 10-11.
45 VanderMeer and Chambers, Steampunk Bible, 205.
channel the original spirit of Punk to address the notions of race, gender, and culture and to challenge the authority of the mainstream culture of the iworld with its boring sameness. Not all who discover the Steampunk community transform into activists, but those who do revel in walking the tightrope strung between humanity and technology. For them, to be a steampunk is to recognize that the Victorian era was fraught with danger, dirt, and grit, “a world shredding itself to death on the spindle of industry” and to consider that punk is about “rage and iconoclasm and desperation.” In other words, “Get punk or go home.”

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CHAPTER TWO: THE PEN MAY BE MIGHTIER, BUT THE PARASOL HOLDS ITS OWN

“Entirely unscientific inquiries suggest that at least 70 percent of steampunkers came to the lifestyle because of the fashion, not the fiction.

(Okay, I totally made that up, but it sounds about right.)”

-Gail Carriger⁴⁷

Steampunk’s Cosplay Culture

It bears repeating that Steampunk continues to require definition. I recently attended the opening of Washington, DC’s “first steampunk-inspired bar.”⁴⁸ The Graham Hotel and its cocktail lounge, Alex, are both named for Alexander Graham Bell. Braving below freezing temperatures on a Friday evening in February, I gathered at the watering hole with a group of friends – all in the name of research, of course (fig. 25). As always, I found myself explaining Steampunk to the uninitiated; considering the collegiate nature of the group, mostly graduate students, I launched into an abbreviated history of the genre starting with the literary roots and ending with the current state of Steampunk subculture.

Despite being in a Steampunk inspired bar, with an abundance of Victorian opulence in the form of damask wall coverings, velvet upholstered settees – lush décor to better suit the tastes of Georgetown, an upscale Washington, DC neighborhood – and the

⁴⁷ Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, Steampunk II: Steampunk Reloaded (San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2010), 401.
requisite references to Steampunk in the, non-functioning, exposed brass pipes on the ceiling and radiators supporting tabletops, fashion was the element that helped these straights better understand Steampunk. I was immediately confronted with the question, ‘What are the boundaries of Steampunk?’ I found myself resorting, as always, to showing various photographs of steampunks on my iphone in an effort to help the straights understand the neo-Victorian/technofantasy/retrofuturism of Steampunk (fig. 26). This discussion inevitably led to questions about steamsonas and the ways in which Steampunk costuming diverges from fictional character driven cosplay.

Figure 25: The Alex Cocktail Lounge
In the 1970’s a faction of sci-fi convention attendees engaged in spectacular culture by dressing-up as various fictional – some of them rather obscure – characters (fig. 27). This playful homage to sci-fi proved to be an incredible crowd pleaser and a popular attraction, so much so that contests were soon initiated prompting greater number of attendees to arrive in costume. By the 1980’s the phenomenon had gained global popularity, and today Japanese youth are the most ardent participants in cosplay culture. Cosplayers generally dress as characters from an assortment of sci-fi sources that include: comics, movies, video games, anime and manga – Japanese animated films and graphic novels. Cosplay is a hybrid act, part costume party, part reenactment, and part performance art. Yet it is more than the sum of its parts, as it transcends simply dressing up for a costume party such as one might at Halloween, but is not precisely historical – or in this case fictional – reenactment. Cosplayers don’t generally reenact scenes from
different storylines, but move in and out of the character as they interact with other cosplayers, usually at cons or other gatherings intended specifically as meet-ups for like-minded individuals.

Figure 27: Wizards by Ralph Bakshi - 1970’s Cosplay

Cons or other cosplay events have become big business, and attendance in character is de rigueur. Comiket, a Japanese comic market held twice a year, is one of the
largest arenas for cosplay with well over 500,000 attendants\textsuperscript{49}. In the United States, New York Comic-Con and San Diego Comic-Con International are the largest, and most prestigious, cosplay events with over 133,000 attendees at each.\textsuperscript{50} However these are only two of many national and regional events, most of which cater to specific sci-fi sub-genres. Cosplay is generally a family friendly activity, and individuals of all ages, gender, culture, and socio-economic backgrounds participate. Cosplayers expend significant resources – time and money – to attend cons. The price of event tickets, travel and lodging is only part of the cost of attendance, an appreciable portion of the expense is likely to be in the investment towards costuming. Cosplayers often make their own costume or create the look using an eclectic mix of commercial and handmade elements; commercial costumes prices can range from just a few dollars to several hundred dollars. Cosplay accounts for a noteworthy portion of today’s global economy, especially in Japan – in 2009 cosplay in Japan accounted for $500 million USD – \textsuperscript{51} and an entire industry of costume designers, both large commercial enterprises and sole proprietors, has burgeoned to support the demand; Steampunk fashion is a significant part of this industry.

Today Steampunk is well represented at any event with a cosplay element; one is just as likely to find Captain America as an ‘airship captain’ at a con, faire, festival, carnival, LARP, or virtually any event that has a costuming component. What sets steampunk apart from cosplay at large is that there is little desire to dress as an established steampunk character. Cosplayers will dress as Batman, Ironman, Captain Picard, Cinderella, C3PO, one of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Pikachu of Pokémon, Sailor Moon, The Mad Hatter, Daenerys Targaryen, or Doctor Who but rarely will there be a sighting of Mina Harker or Dorian Gray from the Steampunk comic series League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (“League”). Despite the plethora of Steampunk literature, steampunks don’t usually dress as these fictional characters, even if they are as beloved as Mr. Spock of Star Trek; each steamsona is distinctive. This takes Steampunk to a level beyond trademarked character costuming. Steampunks create backstories for their characters and then costume themselves accordingly.

The characters steampunks create are often based on some aspect of their own personality or cultural background, as evidenced by the responses I received when interviewing steampunks:

It is more an expression of my own personality, although I sometimes get into character if I am rousing around with friends. Since I am black, I bring the funk to steampunk. For steampunk I have several characters, but I always add an element of African, African American and Rastafari to whatever I wear and portray. It is very much an extension of my personality. I express my 'steamsona' everyday in work, at play and in my home. (Captain Moriba)52

I actually draw from my own background for my persona only I mix it up a little. For example: I am half Irish so instead of being born in the states

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52 Capitan Moriba (steampunk), interview by Samantha Viksnins, February 9, 2015.
my persona was born in Ireland. Also instead of being the second born and youngest of the family my persona is first born and oldest in family. As for the rest of my persona...I keep myself true to who I really am as well as what I wish my persona to be story wise as she is the main character in a novel I am writing. (Lady Rayna Keller)53

I started with Western and SP [Steampunk] is an excuse to add to this wardrobe. I am now better dressed than most of the SASS [Single Action Shooting Society] shooters. My lovely wife keeps asking that I dress up more Victorian but that is not easy to do right. Recently, I have been working on a surprisingly overlooked ethnic variation: Trachten…We tend to sneak a little Alaskan (Gold Rush) into our SP too. (Captain)54

In a way the character has some elements of myself in that he is a complicated apparent contradiction of terms. That and pirates and airship pirates have become far too Cliche both in SP circles and otherwise. So I decided sure I'll play an airship captain, but he's not a pirate but part of the establishment instead, albeit a corrupt member of the establishment (a gentleman smuggler). A sort of white collar crook with morals and honor if you will. (Captain Maximillian) 55

All of the steampunks I interviewed have sobriquets for their steamsonas and just looking at the sampling from above a pattern emerges; captain and lady are popular titles, as is professor. Steampunks may create their own personas but the style and characterizations are found in canonical Steampunk literature. Steampunk is grounded in the Victorian era when the customary form of address was formal, therefore the use of a title in steamsonas is period appropriate. Not all steampunks adhere to the use of a formal title. For example Pho’s moniker – the Peacemaker – only describes her steamsona’s attributes, however I have yet to encounter a steampunk addressed as a mere Mr. or Mrs. As many of the literary protagonists are from the upper echelons of society the use of

54 Captain (steampunk), interview by Samantha Viksnins, February 9, 2015.
55 Capitan Maximillian (steampunk), interview by Samantha Viksnins, February 11, 2015.
titles, aristocratic or military, seems to provide a link to both the era and subculture’s roots. There are four basic Steampunk modes of dress, and these generally conform to a specific Victorian social class and related occupation; most steamsonas tend to be a variant of these categories.

Libby Bulloff, cofounder of *SteamPunk Magazine*, provided an explanation for each dress mode in the second issue of the publication. These not only help define the categories, but in keeping with the Steampunk ethos of DIY, provide how-to guidelines (fig. 28):

**The Tinkerer / The Inventor**
These are the types who do it for science… I picture slightly more well-designed garments with straps, pockets, et cetera, some sort of protective eyewear (the ubiquitous goggle goodness or other such spectacles)...Locate yourself a good vest or jacket with lots of pockets—think cargo Victorian. Stitch cogs on or to your clothing. Carry your tools of trade as accessories—make yourself a leather belt with pockets or straps to harness useful implements. The steampunk inventor believes in form and function.

**The Street Urchin / The Chimney Sweep**
These folks dress in the most ‘punk’ styles of steampunk. We’re talking tatters, filth, safety pins, old leather, bashed-in derbies, and the like. This style of dress is functional, can be mucked about in, costs little to hack together, and nods smugly to the lowest classes of Victorian and steam society. It looks good dirty. Torn stockings puddled around one’s knees or tacked up with garters and pins are most delicious…Cross-dress, by gods! Jam a jaunty feather and a vacuum tube in your hatband! There are no rules besides do-it-yourself.

**The Explorer**
Explorers are, by definition “persons who investigate unknown regions”…Think tailored garments, but more military-influenced and less I-bought-this-at-the-suit-shop. Leather, silk, linen, tall boots, pith helmets, flying goggles—the list of explorer gear goes on… Billowing sleeves or bustled skirts with tight leather vests or corsets are a definite. Borrow Middle-Eastern and Indian flair from belly dance fashion or take a nod from pioneer garb…Mod your own steampunk ray gun from a water pistol and
some aerosol paint and wedge it into your belt or your stockings. Explorers look fine in earth tones, but let a little color peek out here and there.

**The Dandy/The Aesthete**

As close to aristocracy as steampunk gets, which isn’t that close at all. These are the fellows in nicely rendered Victorian and Edwardian suits, brainstorming infernal machines over cigars and brandy, and these are the ladies in high-button boots who dabble as terrorists when they aren’t knitting mittens. Dainty goggles or pince-nez scored at antique shops are a must, as well as simple corsets, handkerchiefs, cigarette cases, gloves, et cetera. By all means, do invest in a top hat or derby with some attitude…The dandy knows better than anyone how to accessorize—little details make the big look.\(^{56}\)

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![Figure 28: Steampunk Dress Modes](source: SteamPunk Magazine, Issue 2.)

Other categorizations may include Scientist, Airship Pirate, The Aristocrat, Time Traveler, Ragamuffin, The Professor, The Fighter, and even Femme Fatale, however all of these can be aligned with the *SteamPunk Magazine* modes of dress. Based on my

ethnographic approach to Steampunk, the Urchin/Ragamuffin look is perhaps the least employed style for a steamsona. Cosplay is escapism and creating a steamsona allows an individuals to fashion themselves in the most complimentary manner. Given this opportunity, it stands to reason that most individuals would prefer to set few limitations to their character’s resources and therefore steamsonas tend towards the hybrid styles of Aristocrat/Dandy/Explorer or Inventor/Explorer; the captain, lady or professor characters fall well within these categories. The lack of urchins is not the only anomaly of note, I’ve also not encountered any Steampunk Lords. Perhaps the use of such a title is counter-intuitive to the spirit of adventure inherent in Steampunk; Captains and Professors are men of action, whereas Lords are historically perceived as prone to engage in pursuit of leisure activity. The above archetypes are all present in one form or another in Steampunk literature, but the canonical styling of Steampunk derives more from comics and film than novels.

**The Evolution of Steampunk Fashion**

In chapter one I discussed how Steampunk style owes much to Punk’s DIY ethos, but gears and goggles weren’t always integral to the literary sub-genre’s mythology. The emergence of Steampunk style is perhaps most directly attributable to comics and films of the 1990s; the earliest examples of comics are *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright* (1990), and *Sebastian O* (1993), and films include *The City of Lost Children* (1995) and *Wild Wild West* (1999). It is in these that the visual style of Steampunk was effected and is discussed below. Early Steampunk novelists gave wardrobe as much consideration as setting – similar attention was paid to a character’s dress as the room in which the
character was standing. Whether the action took place in Victorian London or an imaginary time and place, details only served as a descriptor to set the scene. In Michael Moorcock’s novel, *The Warlord of the Air* (1971), Oswald Bastable, an English Army captain, travels to a remote and supernatural region in the subcontinent known as Kumbalari where the Indian, Nepalese, Tibetan, and Bhutanese borders converge. Following what Bastable considers to be an earthquake he wakes to find himself no longer in the year 1902, but having traveled seventy-one years into the future to 1973. Upon his rescue he is airlifted to Katmandu, and his observations of the cityscape and technology are an example of technofantasy:

Katmandu: the last time I had seen the city it had been very distinctly an Eastern capital with the architecture in the age-old style of these parts. ‘But now…I could see tall white building rising up and up…Certainly there were Nepalese buildings, too, but these were dwarfed by the soaring white piles. I noticed something else…a long ribbon of steel, raised on a series of grey pillars, which stretched away from the city and disappeared over the horizon.
“And what is that?” I asked the doctor.
He looked puzzled. “What? The monorail? Why, just a monorail, of course.”

And later when Bastable sits inside a motorized van:

There was a soft bump as the van began to move. But I did not hear the familiar clatter of an internal combustion engine. “What’s powering this thing?”
“What did you expect? It’s steam, of course. This is an ordinary Stanley flash-fired steamer van”
“Not a petrol engine?”
“I should hope not! Primitive things. The steam motor is infinitely more efficient…”

When dress is mentioned, if at all, it is merely to describe general appearance based on culture, occupation, or a change in fashion. On meeting the high-priest of Kumbalari, Bastable informs, “He wore elaborate robes of brocade stitched with dozens of tiny mirrors. On his head was a tall hat of painted leather inlaid with gold and ivory.”59 Bastable’s airship rescuers “were dressed in white uniforms very similar to those worn by sailors in the tropics, though their jackets and trouser were edged with broad bands of light blue and I did not recognise [sic] the insignia on their sleeves.”60 Women’s fashions are given only the most cursory mention, “The length of girls’ frocks, incidentally, was if anything shorter in London than the first I had seen in Katmandu.”61

With the exception of the high priest, Bastable provides a detailed description only for one individual’s dress. Cornelius Dempsey is:

   a young man dressed in what I had learned was the fashion amongst the wilder undergraduates at Oxford. His black hair was worn rather long and brushed back without a parting. He wore what was virtually a frock coat, with velvet lapels, a crimson cravat, a brocade waistcoat and trousers cut tightly to the knee and then allowed to flair at the bottoms. We should have recognised [sic] it in 1902 as being very similar to the dress affected by the so-called aesthetes. It was deliberately Bohemian and dandified and I regarded people who wore this ‘uniform’ with some suspicion.62

Reflecting the era during which this novel was written, the United States at war in Vietnam and racial tensions in both the United States and United Kingdom, Warlord of the Air is a leftist social commentary. Moorcock’s special attention to Dempsey’s dress

59 Moorcock, The Warlord of Air, 8.
60 Moorcock, The Warlord of Air, 18.
was more likely related to popular attitudes towards the Hippie/Bohemian culture than to suggest any genre-related aesthetics.

Like Moorcock, K. W. Jeter’s novel *Morlock Night* (1979) provides limited details about characters’ dress. *Morlock Night* picks up where H. G. Wells’ *Time Machine* (1895) leaves off; Wells’ Time Traveler has returned to the future of 802,701 AD where the cannibalistic Morlocks have gained control of the time machine and traveled back to the year 1892. One of the Time Traveler’s original nineteenth century dinner guests, Edwin Hocker, is left to deal with the consequences. The only significant mention or notice of dress is made by Hocker and relates to the lone female character, Tafe, who appears “in a man's rough trousers and jacket, with a belted leather harness crossing her shoulders and waist… cradling some odd type of rifle across her knees.”

Later in the novel Hocker once again makes note of Tafe’s appearance when he recognizes a

“young man to be no man at all, but Tafe outfitted in a man’s suit and collar. The elegant cut and the confidence with which she wore it all served to disguise her femininity from anyone who was not aware of her true status. She pulled a thick black cigar from her mouth and winked at me through a cloud of tobacco smoke.”

These are just two examples of early Steampunk literature, but they are representative of the emphasis, or lack thereof, these novelists gave to dress. In reading early Steampunk literature, one is hard pressed to link it to current Steampunk style until one begins to look at Steampunk comics.

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Bryan Talbot’s *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright* (“Luther”) is one of the first Steampunk comics. The black and white images are presented in several different artistic styles, but each page and frame is chock-a-block full of references to history, politics, and world religions. The story is a complex tale set in the late twentieth century. The protagonist, Arkwright, can move between parallel universes and must stop a plot to destabilize the multiverse. As Arkwright moves through the multiverse, an array of images depict these worlds that include World War I soldiers in trenches, Arkwright in 1970’s style jumpsuits or the uniform of the Royal Hussars and even a quintessential Steampunk explorer outfit, and Victorian gentlemen engaging in a duel, (fig. 29). However the comic is difficult to follow and the abundance of imagery with no clear-cut style – which is a style unto itself and fully intended by the author – offers, in retrospect, a variety of styles that could have become known as Steampunk had successive comic book artists continued in the same vein as Talbot. Unfortunately, the complexity, and perhaps abstract notions presented in this comic, more than likely did not allow a concrete visual styling that resonated with audiences; at this early juncture an archetypal Steampunk style had yet to emerge.
Although only three volumes of Sebastian O were published, this full color comic offers some of the best Steampunk has to offer by commandeering literature and history and repackaging it in a tongue-in-cheek manner. The main character, Sebastian O, short for O’Leary, is a thinly veiled Oscar Wilde-cum-James Bond figure; the story begins with Sebastian breaking out of prison where he is serving a sentence for committing moral crimes. It is set in London where every technological advance, actual or envisioned in 1993 – including retina scanners, monorails, hand-held computers, and air travel – is a part of Sebastian’s Victorian England. In his essay “God Save the Queen, for Someone Must!”: Sebastian O and the Steampunk Aesthetic,” Joseph Good argues that this comic is the godfather of Steampunk style for it was the first “to reflect the salient characteristics of the steampunk movement, not only by offering detailed visual
imaginings of the hybrid world of steampunk Victoriana, but also by refracting Victorian decadence through the lens of contemporary popular culture.\textsuperscript{65}

As a dandy, and Wilde incarnate, Sebastian continuously provides witty repartee most often centered on his appearance and wardrobe. In fact, the 2004 omnibus cover (fig. 30) features the excerpt:

“One must commit acts of the highest treason only when dressed in the most resplendent finery… (Original ellipses)

- Sebastian O” \textsuperscript{66}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Figure_30_Sebastian_O.jpg}
\caption{Sebastian O}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{66} Grant Morrison and Steve Yeowell, Sebastian O. (New York: Vertigo Comics 2004), 6.
Sebastian’s tale takes place in 1899 where the comic’s characters are all dressed in the height of Victorian fashion. At first glance there are no particularly outrageous dress violations for the period such as women in trousers, but there certainly is flamboyance in dress and not just from Sebastian. Abbe, a pederast and former associate of Sebastian’s, spends his days in flowing robes of yellow. In the late nineteen century, the color yellow was generally associated with debauchery and scandal; Sebastian O makes repeated references to the Aesthetes and Decadents. Despite the allusions to Victorian Movements – Aesthetic and Decadent – popularly associated with an obsession with beauty, artifice, and rejection of morality, Sebastian O is an action adventure story with murder, chase scenes, Bond-esque henchmen, hand-to-hand combat atop a speeding train, all to stop a villainous plot to take over the Victorian Empire and eventually the world.

Whether it is the lack of time travel – much can be said for providing the reader with the familiar and consistent visual of Victorian England even if it is retrofuturistic – or Sebastian’s obsession with his appearance, or the combination of retrofuturism and Dandyism, readers did relate to Sebastian’s style especially if their personality was naturally prone to the aristocrat mode of Steampunk dress. Sebastian’s clothing, with the exception of the cravat, was not too distinct from men’s suits in the 1990s. His hairstyle, as Good points out, was the same bowl cut worn by members of popular music boy
bands (fig. 31) and easily relatable to contemporary audiences.\textsuperscript{67} Besides, few can resist commentary such as, “The dandy has one unique advantage over the common herd. No matter what the situation, he will always be more exquisitely dressed than his enemies.”\textsuperscript{68}

Where \textit{Luther} and \textit{Sebastian O} employed neo-Victorian and retrofuturism to establish a visual vocabulary for the sub-genre, Jean-Paul Gaultier’s costume designs for the film \textit{The City of Lost Children} (“City”) solidified the technofantasy elements of Steampunk style. The movie is set in an unknown surrealist time and place where fin-de-siècle, inter-war, circus, futuristic and fetish designs coalesce to create a unique stylistic quality (fig. 32). The film is about a scientist, Krank, who is unable to dream and thus kidnaps children to steal their dreams. The costumes for the hired kidnappers, a cult of

\textsuperscript{67} Good, \textit{God Save the Queen}! 210.
\textsuperscript{68} Grant and Yeowell, \textit{Sebastian O}, 24.
blind individuals, have the most predominant Steampunk element, a goggle/binocular type bio-mechanical device that allows them to view the world around them (fig. 33). Other aspects of production such as lighting and set design – including an ocean rig, dream stealing apparatus, a brain preserved in a tank – provide a Victorian inspired atmosphere to the entire film. Whether cosplayers began to adopt the costumes of this film is not currently recorded in press, fan pages, internet blogs, or photo essays.

However, at least one instance of cosplay for the City character Miette can be found on DeviantArt, an online social network for artists (fig. 34). A City video game was released in 1997 – video characters are regularly employed in cosplay. It would be reasonable to assume, given the array of character interpretations at cons, that City characters made an appearance at cons during the 1990s.

Figure 32: The City of Lost Children – Miette and One
Source: https://steampunkfilm.wordpress.com/about-city-of-lost-children/
Steampunks presumably bemoan the film *Wild Wild West* (“WWW”)\(^69\) when discussing Steampunk, though personally I have met many steampunks who reference the film, without a single groan or grimace, when explaining the genre. The film is a remake of a 1960’s proto-Steampunk television show. Certainly the film’s plot – United States government agents on a mission to stop an assassination attempt on President

\(^69\) VanderMeer and Chambers, *Steampunk Bible*, 188.
Ulysses S. Grant – is hindered by over-the-top acting and tedious dialogue, but the steam-powered technology, which includes a steam-powered tank, flying machines, and a giant mechanized spider, is quintessential Steampunk. Though most of the cast are in period appropriate costume, the crippled villain, Arliss Loveless, is costumed in spectacular cravat, top hat, waxed moustache, and moves about in a steam-powered wheelchair; the character is often represented in cosplay. Other examples of sartorial Steampunk can also be glimpsed in the film, for instance the hybrid Victorian/Viking, Victorian/Bavarian and Victorian/Femme Fatale costumes of Loveless’ female employees (fig. 35); any of these could and would readily have been worn by cosplayers in the early years of Steampunk.

![Figure 35: Wild Wild West – Movie Still](http://www.anyclip.com/movies/wild-wild-west/loveless-offer/).
In all the comics and films cited above, costuming plays as significant a role in the story as the individual characters and these are nothing short of spectacular. Exquisite and elegant attire as espoused by Sebastian O is an oft cited reason for adopting Steampunk style. A similar neo-Victorian style was already worn by the Goths in the 1990s and some have jokingly stated that “Steampunk is what happens when Goths discover brown”. To make the leap from film to everyday attire was not a giant leap for early proponents of Steampunk style. The steamverse credits production/costume designer Kit Stølen with pioneering the everyday spectacle of Steampunk. In 2001, Stølen was a costume student with an internship in London and heavily into the Goth scene when he put together his, what has now become iconic, Steampunk look; Stølen’s photograph is among the top twenty images generated in an internet search for Steampunk fashion. Stølen describes how he arrived at this look which includes a frock coat, cravat, goggles and hair extensions (fig. 36):

For years I’d been obsessed with 19th century menswear and made it into a pet hobby, dissecting old garments to learn how they were really engineered. Made myself as close to historically accurate replicas as I could get and wore them as my everyday clothes. This is in large part because I’m 6’5” and nothing fits me anyways. I preferred the cut of 19th century suits and can pretty much wear them in modern society without looking too abnormal… Back then when someone dressed ‘victorian’[sic] it usually mean some sort of cheap velvet frockcoat and a ruffly [sic]poet shirt, which didn’t mesh with my historical understanding of the 19th century, which became more about hard solid shapes, somber clothing. The “stark bourgeois” of

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the latter 19th century industrial revolution. And I set about crafting a fashion that attempted to meet more industrial esthetics. 71

Whether Stølen is solely responsible for starting the Steampunk fashion trend in 2003 is debatable. It would be wonderful to think that everyday steampunk style grew organically via fan interpretation, but there must be a visual medium through which ideas are shared, consumed, interpreted and reinterpreted. In the early 1990s when the World Wide Web was still a nascent means of communication, film was the primary means of distributing sci-fi visual culture. Stølen’s photographs may have gone viral in 2003 to “help demonstrate that steampunk can be produced in fashion as well as in

literature,“ but Steampunk costumes had already been immortalized in movies such as City, WWW and League (2003).

Like City and WWW, League was released prior to Stølen’s photographs having gone viral in 2003. Based on a comic of the same name, League brings together Dracula’s Mina Harker (formerly Murray), Wilde’s Dorian Gray, Allan Quartermain of King Solomon’s Mines, Twain’s Tom Sawyer as an adult, Captain Nemo and other nineteenth century fictional characters to save the British Empire from engaging in a war with Germany. If steampunks discuss WWW with a certain amount of forbearance, League leaves them shuddering involuntarily; the plot is even more cumbersome than WWW and the acting wooden. Perhaps steampunks reserve a certain amount of tolerance for this film because the comic, at least the first several volumes, is quite superior in its Sebastian O-esque witticisms and spot-on portrayal of the underbelly of Victorian society. The costumes in League lend themselves more easily to everyday style – especially the khaki trousers and safari-type vests worn by Quartermain and Sawyer’s characters. Harker’s signature red scarf, used to hide Dracula’s bites, can easily be paired with a fitted women’s blazer worn with a pencil skirt or trousers.

Cultural theorist, Efrat Tseēlon, contends that fashion theory should be considered less through personal accounts and more through the cultural linguistics that signify stylistic choices. When considering why certain clothing choices are made “accounts that appear personal and individual do not, in fact, originate inside the private

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space of the person, but are created by the language in which they are couched, and are, therefore, shared meanings, part of a public and collective reality.”73 Stølen was heavily into the Goth and club scenes in London and Los Angeles where spectacular style is both the norm and celebrated. Additionally, Stølen was a budding costume designer at the time and his professionally modeled look was meant to emphasize spectacle. In 2003, the last strains of the dot.com era inspired polo shirt and Dockers were still popular in men’s attire. Stølen’s street style needed to be appropriated by the mass media before it was adopted by the public at large; a phenomenon discussed in chapter three. Therefore it would be more accurate to state that it was a combination of comics, film costumes, Stølen’s dress – so well suited to his impressive physique – and the steampunks in Stølen’s social circle that helped launch the look.

**Criticisms of Steampunk Costuming**

Hebdige argues that as soon as a subculture’s style emerges, it is absorbed and commoditized by the dominant culture. Along with commoditization comes criticism from the ‘hard-core’ or early adopter element of the subculture as well as those who automatically associate subcultures with deviant behavior; Steampunk is no exception. It is precisely this commoditization that generates criticism, both from within and without the steampunk community; note Prasarn’s diatribe – discussed in the introduction – about labeling Prada’s collection as Steampunk. Criticisms range from feminist issues over the corset’s role as ‘agent of sexualization’ to rampant use of frivolous accessories

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such as gears and goggles. Other criticisms focus on whether the style can be divorced from Victorian England or American Wild West and still be considered Steampunk. I’ll consider each of these objections in relation to both historical and literary significance, where applicable.

There is considerable uproar about the objectification of women in Steampunk through the donning of corsets. Many individuals are critical of the Victorian corset and regard it as a cruel, sexist practice that was used to keep women bound, both physically and emotionally into an inferior position; to voluntarily wear a corset today is the equivalent of regressing towards a patriarchal society. This view of corsetry is a fallacy as Victorian women were hardly passive participants in corset culture. They were very much empowered and wore corsets by choice; much the same way that most modern women will not appear in public without a push-up bra. As consumers, Victorian women drove the market for corsets, just as is true today. For steampunks, corsets don’t symbolize female repression, but rather power. This shift comes from women choosing where, when and how to wear corsets – as outerwear rather than as a foundation garment – and has even influenced Steampunk literature.

Kirk Whitmer, designer of corsets and waist cinchers, is an avid fan of Steampunk literature. He credits William Gibson and Bruce Sterling’s *Difference Engine* (1990) with his love for Steampunk style. Many steampunks and writer-scholars consider *Difference Engine* to be the finest example of the sub-genre. This first-wave Steampunk novel is an alternate history in which Charles Babbage has successfully invented the computer “thus ushering in the Information Age at the same time as the
Industrial Revolution. Lord Byron leads an Industrial Radical Party…and the British Empire grows to be a superpower.” The imaginative what-if adventure is littered with picturesque prose and the authors takes every opportunity to describe dress:

a British soldier, an Artillery subaltern, in elegant dress-gear. He wore a double-breasted blue coatee, bright with chevrons, brass buttons, and gold-braided epaulets. His sleek trousers had a red military stripe. He wore a round, gold-laced forage-cap, and a buttoned pistol-holster at his neat white waistbelt.

Despite being a favorite among sci-fi readers, costumes, no matter how elaborately described, still function only as dress and denote a character’s position in society and relative attitudes. This holds true for the description of women’s dress:

Stepping deftly out of her skirt, she began to remove her corset and a stiff crinkled petticoat.
"You wear no crinoline," Mallory noted hoarsely.
"Don't like 'em." She popped the waistband of the petticoat and laid it aside. She deftly picked the wire hooks of the corset and eased its laces open, then wriggled it over her hips and stood there, breathing in relief, in her lace chemise.

Today’s Steampunk literature takes a cue from fashion and heroines like League’s Mina Harker; women are just as likely to be the protagonists. Their corsets are often made of steel – in one instance it is a power source keeping its owner alive – and are fitted with belts and pockets that serve as holsters for weaponry. Many of these adventuresses, like Finley in The Girl in the Steel Corset, wear corsets as a type of armor:

Finley’s mouth dropped open as Emily lifted the most wonderfully strange contraptions she’d ever seen. “Is that…is that a corset?”
She stepped closer, tentatively reaching out to touch the cold metal. A steel corset – thin, shiny bands with embossed flowers and leaves, held

74 VanderMeer and Chambers, Steampunk Bible, 57.
75 William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, Difference Engine (New York: Bantam, 1992), 259.
76 Gibson and Sterling, Difference Engine, 225.
together with tiny hinges to allow ease of movement. Little gears and other decorative pieces of steel were soldered over some of the larger gaps between bands. The garment looked like an industrial metal flower garden. “The spaces are small enough that bullets and most blades won’t be able to get through, and if someone hits you the bounder’s going to break a knuckle or two.”

There was a side of Finley that saw the corset as a little frightening, but it was beautiful. Another side couldn’t wait to put it on. It was protection – armor. A normal girl shouldn’t need armor, but a girl who often courted trouble, who wanted to protect herself and her friends loved it.77

Steampunk reimagines the past, including the traditional roles of women. In the case of The Girl in the Steel Corset, Finley is the fighter for whom the corset is designed, but Emily is the engineer. Steampunk corsets are an affirmation of women’s status as intellectual equals “an announcement of a woman’s place in the public sphere, clad for battle alongside, or against men and cyborgs.”78 Rather than enslaving, they emancipate women.

Emancipation of women is not just limited to literature. Psyche Chimere, a Steampunk musician and performance artist, came to the genre when many of her Goth fans started to gravitate to Steampunk. Psyche regularly started to wear corsets when she was asked to model in Steampunk shows by various friends who were corset designers. She eventually commissioned Whitmer to design a special corset in which she could comfortably perform while maintaining the Victorian silhouette; the result is the Miss Chimere saffron and black corset (fig. 37). Psyche chose the fabric and color to specifically compliment her skin tone, and to create a dramatic look for the stage. She

worked with Whitmer to design the corset so the hourglass shape falls a few inches below her natural ribcage. This allows Psyche to take the deep breaths necessary to perform in her unique pitch and hit the appropriate notes. Psyche took control of the corset design and decided on a style that would complement not just her physical attributes but also allow her to work comfortably.\textsuperscript{79}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure37.png}
\caption{Miss Chimere – Demi-bust Corset with Halter Strap}
\textit{Source: http://copperlune.com/shop/ms-chimere-demi-bust-corset/}.
\end{figure}

Goggles too, are heavily criticized. Unless one is welding or working with otherwise dangerous materials, there is no need for every steampunk to wear goggles, claim the critics. But Steampunk is sci-fi. One never knows when adventure is around the corner; time travel is always a possibility, even when traveling by airship or velocycle

\textsuperscript{79} Psyche Chimere (musician), interview by Samantha Viksnins, February 14, 2015.
one must always be prepared and protected (fig. 38). Steampunk goggles come in all shapes and sizes. Some are incredibly elaborate like TGT Studio’s Five Lens Steampunk Sleepy Hollow Mad Scientist Goggles (fig. 39). This custom creation was available as a limited edition on Etsy and embodies the maker spirit of the artist who describes the workmanship and utility as follows:

The goggles are made from a durable and flexible plastic base and have been affixed with a fully adjustable and customized five lens system. Hand painted in metallic copper acrylic. The goggles feature a fully adjustable thick leather-like vinyl strap with buckle and brass bolts for added durability. The adjustable five lens system is fastened on with suede and features a large flip down magnifier over the left eye and a fully opposable arm with two smaller flip down lenses on each side of the goggles. The lenses on the goggles themselves are actually clear glass/acrylic, not black as they appear in the photos.\(^\text{80}\)

The TGT Studio goggles are just one example in a range of options available on the internet or at any cosplay vendor stall. Bronze acrylic paint will turn any plastic pair of goggles purchased at an army supply store into Steampunk goggles. One may even
wear simple spectacles and attach a set of clip-on eye loupes (fig.40) to complete the look. Like corsets, goggles, which only received cursory mention in early Steampunk literature as part of preparation for travel on a dirigible perhaps, have become an important element in story telling:

He...removed a most bizarre pair of gogglelike things. They were gold in color with multiple lenses on one side, between which appeared to be some kind of liquid. The contraption was also riddled with small knobs and dials. Professor Lyall propped the ridiculous things onto his nose...twiddling at the dials expertly. 

Even the Steampunk Scholar uses goggles to explain the aforementioned elements of Steampunk by moving the loupe attachments successively in front of “smoked lenses” to perceive and analyze neo-Victorianism, technofantasy and retrofuturism. Goggles epitomize optimism and myriad possibilities through application of technology and scientific discovery.

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Simultaneously revered and abhorred, hot-glue application of gears, without regard for utility and function, is high on the list of the most ardent critics of Steampunk costumes; gears mustn’t be used willy-nilly because gears have a function in clockwork and machinery, especially when referencing the heavily mechanized nineteenth century. The very idea of printing gears on accessories, attaching them to top-hats and corsets, and turning them into earrings, necklaces, and cufflinks sends shudders through those who hold dearly to Arts and Crafts principles of honesty in design. However, gears are to steampunk what safety pins were to punk style; they are a shorthand for the Steampunk design vocabulary. The same criticisms were hurled at the frivolous use of safety pins on a black ensemble and calling it Punk. Yet this did not stop the appropriation of the safety pin motif by Zandra Rhodes for her 1977 ‘Conceptual Chic’ collection. This dress currently in the Victoria & Albert Museum’s collection included a black rayon jersey dress embellished with strategically placed tears, chains, and beaded
safety pins (fig. 41). Like corsets and goggles, no second wave Steampunk literature is complete without reference to gear-driven technology. Steampunks time and again state that they seek to once again connect with technology. They want to see how things work and be able to fix their cars and appliances once again. Skeleton technology with exposed gears is the answer to providing this connection to objects. Despite the criticism, gear embellished accessories are here to stay – one fears the entire mechanism of Steampunk would come to a grinding halt if gears were banished.

Figure 41: Zandra Rhodes - Evening Dress 1977
Source: http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15649/conceptual-chic-evening-dress-rhodes-zandra/

The criticisms don’t just stop at corsets and goggles – multi-cultural representations of Steampunk are often under attack both because they exist and because there aren’t enough of them. High on the list is the charge of exoticizing and therefore subjugating ‘ethnic’ culture. When the quintessential steampunked Anglo heritage belly
dancer appears at a con there are likely to be charges of ‘there is more to the east than belly dancing.’ Though certainly not the only depiction of non-Anglo culture, the belly dancer is among the more popular dress interpretations in cosplay. Western popular culture has a long history of adopting the most salacious – actual or perceived – aspects of other cultures and exploiting them as a means of escapism from societal norms; debauched behavior is tolerated, even expected, when the perpetrator arrives dressed as Bacchus. The colonizing Victorians were just as guilty as the cultures before and after of highlighting and perpetuating notions of the ‘Other.’ During the 1889 and the 1893 World’s Fairs held in Paris and Chicago respectively, ethnological exhibitions were major attractions.\textsuperscript{83} At the Chicago World’s Fair Little Egypt, a belly dancer was presented as the exotic other and she went on to have a notorious career.\textsuperscript{84} Steampunks are generally literature and history buffs and as a result many feel this stereotype of the exotic easterner should cease to exist, or at a minimum should not be practiced by those of Anglo ethnicity.

Some ‘purists’ may feel that the Victorian period can only be interpreted through London and American Wild West settings because of the Vernian and Edisonade literary roots, while others may not be opposed to non-Anglo settings, but still struggle if the


requisite dirigibles and steam-powered technology are not front and center.85 One cannot ignore that non-Anglo countries were colonized by a Western power or otherwise maintained economic and political ties with them; they were active participants in the Victorian era and have a place in Steampunk. The global popularity of Steampunk negates the arguments for Anglicized interpretations. Steampunk is just as popular in France as in Australia, in Japan as in Brazil, in Spain as in Egypt. Steampunks celebrate their multi-cultural heritage and recognize that in a retrofuturistic world, scenarios other than one in which the West is the conqueror are possible.

Many steampunks are sensitive to issues of cultural appropriation. The following concern was posed on a Steampunk social network:

So I have been looking into different elements of different cultures to see what would be cool to mesh together into a shaman look and I have run across some articles and pages talking about how some of the iconic images of certain cultures (some of which I really want to incorporate into my outfit) are actually deeply rooted in their cultures or such a stereotype that when people outside of those cultures use them it comes off as an insult.86

These are genuine and valid concerns for any cosplayer because there exists a fine line between interpretation and being offensive. Yet, if one has a non-Anglo background does this mean they should only adopt costumes or a steamsona that echoes their cultural heritage? If a non-Anglo dresses in an English inspired steampunk costume, is that not cultural appropriation as well? What of the non-Anglo steampunk who was born and


raised in the West and wants to wear a belly dancer costume ‘just like the white girls do’ but will likely be a victim of cultural stereotyping? Should steampunks outside of the United States and United Kingdom be limited to the Anglo interpretation of Steampunk?

Of course not all steampunks engage in cosplay but do adopt a steampunk style in their everyday attire. Bulloff notes “there are two basic factions within Steampunk: ‘Serious cosplayers…and…a ‘Steampunk casual,’ a more palatable daily-wear look that pulls from a plethora of vintage influence.” On meeting von Slatt, Bulloff was surprised to find him casually dressed because his online presence hints at a man of action, getting dirty and gritty in the workshop (fig. 42). Steampunk writers and makers do not often engage in cosplay as they already embody Steampunk in their creative processes. This was confirmed in the personal interviews I conducted, for example Anthony Stevens said:

I’ve read about it for years, but never realized the term until I started running into folks at SciFi conventions. Most of my friends inhabit both worlds…Haven't selected a steamsona… I'm generally straightforward as a technogeek, photographer, and writer.  

87 VanderMeer and Chambers, *Steampunk Bible*, 133.  
88 Anthony Stevens (steampunk), interview by Samantha Viksnins, February 9, 2015.
Coming back to the issue of ‘what is Steampunk,’ the individuals most likely to draw boundaries within which Steampunk can function are likely to be the cosplayers who obsess over every detail of their costumes trying to achieve an authentic look based on their interpretation. Steampunks themselves understand that the subculture is about mashing together a vintage look without getting caught up in authenticity. Steampunk is as authentic as the Victorian era was, which is to say not at all; the Victorians were engaged in multiple revivals simultaneously.\(^8^9\) Like steampunks they took their technology, iron and steel, and overlaid it with various design aesthetics suited to individual tastes. All of Victoriana is a pastiche of some combination of elements pulled from sources ranging from Gothic, Renaissance, Moorish, Japanese, Arthurian, Chinese, Egyptian, to Classical.

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Dress is the fulcrum for different elements – literature, music, art – of Steampunk, and has been the basis for the subculture’s proliferation. Without costumes Steampunk would remain a near obscure sub-genre of sci-fi and as Carriger also points out, “Even though I am a steampunk author, I genuinely believe that the attire of steampunk is as vital to the movement as the literature.”\textsuperscript{90} If a costume accessory can be manipulated and steampunked in some manner, authors are very willing to do so. Carriger’s \textit{Parasol Protectorate} series capitalizes on this concept. The protagonist Lady Macon carries a parasol that is a weapon. It can emit light or gases to vanquish the vampires and werewolves that threaten her world. The above examples from second-wave (mid-1990’s onward) literature show that today the written art form is just as driven by costuming as by the concept of alternative history. Steampunk literature was around before costuming popularized it to a broader audience and will undoubtedly continue to flourish long after Steampunk style has run its course. In answer to Carriger, I believe the pen will prove mightier and Lady Macon’s silver-tipped parasol will eventually retire into obscurity, but not before it has inspired innovation in proto steam-power weaponized accessories.

\textsuperscript{90} Gail Carriger, “Which is Mightier, the Pen or the Parasol?” in Steampunk Reloaded, 403.
CHAPTER THREE: STRAIGHT TRANSFORMATIONS

“Fashion is never finished, it crosses all kinds of boundaries. It is ongoing and changes with each person’s visual and material interpretation of who he or she is becoming and how this connects with other’s interpretations.”

-Susan B. Kaiser\textsuperscript{91}

“deviation from the norm ain’t what it used to be. Deviation from the norm seems, well, normal.”

-Dylan Clark\textsuperscript{92}

Consumerism and Steampunk

Appropriation by mainstream media is the fate of youth subcultures in the twentieth century. From the leather jackets worn by James Dean and Marlon Brando to the flower power bohemian style of the hippies, Punk, Hip Hop, Chicano, or Goth, none have been spared the profit seeking gaze of commercial enterprise. “Subcultural deviance is simultaneously rendered ‘explicable’ and meaningless in...media at the same time as the ‘secret objects of subcultural style are put on display in every...chain-store boutique.’\textsuperscript{93} Steampunk Bible hit the bookshelves in 2011 and by then VanderMeer and steampunks alike would have noticed the trickle up fashion trending from street style to high style taking place in the collections of several fashion designers.

\textsuperscript{93} Hebdige, Subculture, 130.
VanderMeer stated that Steampunk reached critical mass in 2008, especially soon after the *New York Times* published the article “*Steampunk moves between 2 Worlds.*”94 New York Times writer Ruth La Ferla eloquently identified the appeal of Steampunk costumes,

> “Quaint to some eyes, or outright bizarre, steampunk fashion is compelling all the same. It is that rarity, a phenomenon with the potential to capture a wider audience, offering a genteel and disciplined alternative to both the slack look of hip-hop and the menacing spirit of goth.”95

Steampunk defiance may not be readily recognizable by the straights – how threatening can a monocle really be – but it is resistance of mainstream culture nonetheless. By the time *New York Times* article was published the movies *WWW, League,* and *The Prestige* (2006), all of which boasted major Hollywood star power, had generated a club culture participated in by the likes of Stølen whose Steampunk sartorial elegance had gone viral in 2003. The 2013 exhibition, “Club to Catwalk,” at the Victoria and Albert Museum examined how the 1980’s club scene “emerging theatricality in British fashion as the capital’s vibrant and eclectic club scene influenced a new generation of designers.”96

Just as the club style of the 1980’s was emulated on the catwalk, so too is Steampunk style. I’ve already discussed Prada’s Men’s Fall/Winter 2012 Collection and how it relates to Steampunk, but Prada was not the first to incorporate a fin-de-siècle aesthetic in recent years.

In the early days of Steampunk fashion trickle up, Ralph Lauren was perhaps the first to design a collection that referenced the Victorian era. *Vogue UK* lauded the Spring 2008 Ready-to-Wear collection and the designer’s genius:

all the looks were new, of course, but they also referenced the sartorial high points of Lauren’s career. The show opened with the safari and riding ensembles the designer is famous for…Then came the ruffled, floral-sprigged garden party dresses Lauren does so well, transporting the audience from stable and high seas to high tea circa 1935… He then yanked us back to the here-and-now with a suite of bright yellow-and-black separates …before once again returning to an equestrian theme. An ode to colour followed – with vibrant jewel-toned gowns first…and elegant, white tie looks next.97

Officially this collection was an homage to mark Lauren’s forty years in the fashion industry, however the steampunk elements are readily identifiable in the top hats, cravats, short fitted jackets presented over ruffled skirts – both mini and maxi – and accessories such as riding crops and gloves. Ralph Lauren has always favored the equestrian look, but doesn’t usually channel the high Victorian silhouette; even the evening dresses in bright colors were paired with top hats and gloves; the collection drew a distinct visual link to the clothes worn by Mina Harker in *League* (figs. 43 and 44).

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Figure 43: Ralph Lauren Spring 2008 Ready-to-Wear

Figure 44: League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Vol. 1 Cover
Source: http://www.wired.com/2013/07/league-extraordinary-gentlemen-tv/
Other designers weren’t as quick to appropriate the Steampunk aesthetic. John Galliano’s spring 2006, 2007, and 2008 couture collections for Christian Dior can only be described, respectively, as French Revolution, Aesthetic Movement, and mid-century glam, but all seemed to be leading up to the moment when Galliano, who favors a spectacular style for himself, would be inspired by Steampunk. In 2010, fashionistas had a chance to gaze upon Galliano’s top hats and riding crops (fig. 45). Again there is no suggestion from the designer himself that this is a Steampunk inspired collection. In fact, according to Galliano he was researching couturier James Charles, “And then I was looking at a photo of Charles James doing a fitting—and on the wall behind him was a picture of women riding sidesaddle. And that was it!”98 The collection included dresses and hats worthy of Ascot Racecourse à la *My Fair Lady* (1964), like Lauren before him there is nary a visible corset or bronze leather vest, but with the top hats, buckle and spat detailing on the shoes, and the long tradition of designers appropriating street style, the notion that there is no Steampunk influence in this collection is not easily dismissed.

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Alexander McQueen was cited by *New York Times* as one of the designers who “favored” the Steampunk style. Prior to his suicide in 2010, McQueen had not designed a collection that could distinctly be called Steampunk. McQueen, celebrated for his theatrical shows on the catwalk that included not just sensational styles, but were more often than not presented with biting social commentary, embodied the spirit of Punk. Even if his collections do not immediately reference the Steampunk aesthetic, La Ferla appropriately linked McQueen to the subculture. As a Savile Row trained designer, the bespoke tailoring and elegance of cut and line sought after by steampunks is one of
McQueen’s most enduring legacies. Though McQueen himself did not design a collection that might be labeled Steampunk, his protégé and creative director of the Alexander McQueen fashion house Sarah Burton’s Spring/Summer 2013 collection had many drawing a connection between the subculture and high fashion. In shades of yellow and honeycomb motifs, this collection is honey bee inspired, but the corsets and crinolines as outerwear or otherwise appearing in the dress detailing put this collection squarely in the recent wave of Victorian inspired designs (fig. 46).

Figure 46: Alexander McQueen Spring/Summer 2013

None of the designers whose collections for the past eight years bear a resemblance to Steampunk directly credit the subculture, but the parallels are hard to miss. I do not suggest that fashion designers have been wholly inspired by Steampunk and yet refuse to acknowledge it, but the heavy influence is undeniable. Designers are highly trained individuals who turn to a variety of sources for inspiration including art, music, history, and politics, “Their work creates a bridge between the physical characteristics of garments, their social meanings, and the imaginations of consumers...”\(^{100}\) and street style is part of the zeitgeist. Considering the above collections and the variety of approaches and design interpretations of Lauren, Galliano, Prada and Burton, to propose that they were all specifically trying to cash in on the popularity of Steampunk would undermine their genius. But Steampunk has undeniably been a part of the high fashion world, both “America’s Top Model” and “Project Runway”, television reality shows that focus specifically on the fashion industry, featured episodes where Steampunk as an aesthetic was showcased. The designer collections discussed above all have elements that can be easily incorporated in an everyday Steampunk style or even cosplay. That in recent years major collections time and again reference a specific period concurrent with the trend in neo-Victorianism is noteworthy.

High fashion collections may have referenced neo-Victorianism, but there is a flourishing web-based, brick and mortar, and artist/maker market in Steampunk fashions. Etsy, Amazon, and EBay all carry Steampunk clothing and accessories. Specialty web

retailers include SteampunkCouture.com, SteampunkEmporium.com, ClockworkCouture.com, and GentlemanEmporium.com are just some of the sites where people can outfit themselves in head-to-toe Steampunk magnificence; each website offers something unique to its customers. Steampunk Couture was one of the first web-based clothiers. Started in 2005 by independent designer Kato, this woman-owned small business provides made-to-order clothes. Each season Kato creates new designs and the evolution in the Steampunk aesthetic can be traced in her collection archive. Her 2006 and 2007 pieces were easily incorporated into the sporty, post-goth look popular among those who favored alternative styles (fig. 47). From 2008 to 2011, the collections were noticeably geared towards cosplayers as evidenced by the Victorian silhouettes and available accessories (fig. 48). In more recent years, the collections have less of a cosplay element and the styles, like the early collections, can more easily be incorporated in everyday styles. This suggests that while the aesthetic is still popular, steampunks, especially those who don’t often engage in cosplay, are once again looking for casual and subtle ways in which to express themselves.
Figure 47: Steampunk Couture Summer 2006

Figure 48: Steampunk Couture Spring 2011
The other clothier websites have a ready-to-wear business model. Steampunk Emporium’s niche represents the Los Angeles artist and sci-fi celebrity scene. Among the models featured on the website are Grant Imahara of the television series “Myth Busters” (fig. 49), Felicia Day from “Buffy the Vampire”, and Will Wheaton of the Star Trek franchise. Having this link with a local and celebrity community adds considerable cache to the website as fans have published images of their favorite actor as steampunk in blogs and on Pinterest providing infinite free publicity. Steampunk Emporium was also one of the first Steampunk websites, started in 2003. It offers not just the clothes, but a readymade steamsona. Outfits are marketed with names such as “Arlo Beesom, Alchemist,” “Percival Westbury, Egyptologist,” and “Barnaby Clifton, Intrepid Motorist.” Other websites offer a more mundane experience, but the choices are just as plentiful and can fit any budget.

Figure 49: Clockwork Couture, Grant Imahara

Websites are not the only place one can easily find Steampunk attire. A number of designers and artists run small businesses and can more easily be found traveling from con to festival, where a majority of their revenue is earned. These individuals have a minimum web presence because the cost of photography and upkeep of online orders does not fit their business model for a number of reasons. Many of these vendors prefer the face-to-face contact they have with the buying public, giving customers who prefer the tactile method of shopping an opportunity to evaluate the materials, construction and quality of the goods. Chain retailers such as Hot Topic cater to youth participating in a number of subcultures. Steampunk is just one of the many styles available for sale. Moreover, the clothes at these chain retailers can often serve a cross function, if an individual wanted to steampunk Dr. Who, Hot Topic – where one can buy Tardis stockings, top hat, and a pocket watch – can provide a one-stop shopping experience.

Steampunk has casually seeped into the everyday design aesthetic without the knowledge of straights. The aforementioned Alex bar in the Graham Hotel is not the only Steampunk lounge. There are a number of Steampunk inspired pubs and restaurants around the world, and some have gained more publicity than others. In 2014, Joben Bistro opened in Romania with great fanfare and international press coverage (fig. 50). These are examples of establishments that readily acknowledge Steampunk influences, but other restaurants have incorporated the aesthetic under the guise of ‘industrial’ design. Outside American Taproom, a United States chain eatery in Bethesda, Maryland, gas lamps blaze during all open hours (fig. 51). In fall 2014, a newly opened Thai
restaurant in Reston, Virginia, featured ‘Edison’ light bulbs (fig. 52) – exposed filament in tube-like glass with bronze hardware. Bethesda and Reston are both posh suburbs of Washington, DC and while the residents are among the most highly educated, socially conscious, and technically savvy in the country, they aren’t always particularly aware of alternative life styles.

Figure 50: Joben Bistro, Romania
I did not want to make any assumptions about La Ong Thai restaurant’s proprietor, a thirty-something urban American male of Thai ancestry, so I inquired about
his design choice. Joe informed me that he was “always attracted to industrial design” and was wholly unaware of Steampunk.\textsuperscript{102} He was right, of course – the industrial revolution took place in the nineteenth century and the design aesthetic was, well, industrial – but a shift has taken place in the public’s conception of what constitutes the industrial look; the white walled room with exposed HVAC ducts painted silver or black has given way to brick walls and exposed brass works.

The recent popularity of handle bar mustache adorned coffee mugs, stickers, and tote bags etc., all owe a nod to Steampunk and neo-Victorianism. Party planning tips on Pinterest regularly feature the miniature top hats – favored by steampunk females – on cakes, as candy filled party favors, and stacked as centerpieces. A recent Google Doodle to celebrate the 270\textsuperscript{th} birthday of physicist Alessandro Volta featured an interactive logo reminiscent of an Alexander Graham Bell invention (fig 53). Charlotte Connelly, a science and technology historian, took Google to task in her online article for a United Kingdom publication, “Today’s Google doodle might lead you to think that Alessandro Volta [1745-1827] invented the light bulb…” stated the subhead for the article.\textsuperscript{103} Connelly appreciated the acknowledgement of Volta’s contribution to science – the unit of measurement for electricity, volt, is named for him – but was justifiably irritated by the choice of design from a completely different century. When I opened a new google search tab on February 18, 2015, and saw the Steampunk doodle I immediately looked

\textsuperscript{102} Joe Wong, (restaurateur), interview by Samantha Viksnins, October 25, 2015.
for the significance of Volta. I was surprised to discover his celebrated research took place in the eighteenth, not the nineteenth century, as implied by the doodle. Volta was alive in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, therefore some, would consider this splitting hairs. The point is that currently it is fashionable to evoke the nineteenth century aesthetic whether, appropriate or not.

Figure 53: Google Doodle for the 270th Birthday of Physicist Alessandro Volta
Source: http://www.theguardian.com/science/the-b-word/2015/feb/18/alessandro-volta-anniversary-electricity-history-science

Fashion, home décor, and party planning aren’t the only aspects of modern life that incorporate Steampunk. The trend extends to theatrical interpretation such as Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Currently Cirque du Soleil, a Canadian circus troupe internationally known for its extravagant, themed shows, is touring “Kurios: Cabinet of Curiosities.” The show is marketed with the following tagline:

Step into the curio cabinet of an ambitious inventor who defies the laws of time, space and dimension in order to reinvent everything around him. Suddenly, the visible becomes invisible, perspectives are transformed,
and the world is literally turned upside down in a place that’s as beautiful as it is mysterious.\textsuperscript{104}

Gramophones, clocks, airships, goggles, top hats, and of course handle bar mustaches all make an appearance on stage. The show, exactly as promised, takes the audience through fantastical and retrofuturistic adventures of the cast that include a strong man, an airship pilot, and deep sea creatures. Here is one more chance for the straights around the world to experience Steampunk without knowledge of the quiet revolution in which they are taking part.

**The Boiling Point**

The above analysis shows that Steampunk will not be running out of steam anytime soon. The internet’s role in the rise of Steampunk cannot be ignored, and everyday someone new discovers Steampunk. Engagement in sci-fi cons and cosplay predates the World Wide Web, as do anime and manga. For a genre as obscure as Steampunk to gain an international reputation within a matter of a few short years is directly attributable to the internet. Blogs, virtual chat rooms, online retailers, and social media are all instrumental in the dissemination of ideas and Steampunk has benefitted from the technology by expanding beyond the literary movement. *SteamPunk Magazine* was first published as an online journal, and the internet is what allowed makers/tinkerers to connect, but it was Steampunk fashion that flourished within this visual medium; recall Stølen’s Steampunk style having gone viral in 2003. The 2013 IBM Social Sentiment

Index predicted Steampunk as a new retail trend. Measuring web activity on blogs and social media IBM found:

steampunk is evolving into a cultural ‘meme’ via a series of leaps across cultural domains (such as fiction, visual arts, etc.)… been able to track the spread of trends geographically, chronologically and now, culturally. From 2009 to 2012, the amount of steampunk chatter has increased eleven-fold. Since 2010, more than two dozen US department stores and specialty retailers have become steampunk savvy. During the next two years, IBM predicts that steampunk will shift from low production, high cost “craft” manufacturing to mass production…

- 33 percent of online fashion chatter around steampunk can be found on gaming sites
- 2010 saw a year on year increase in chatter of 296 percent...
- 63 percent of fashion discussions around steampunk are initiated by individuals less than 30 years old
- 55 percent of social sentiment chatter for steampunk fashion derived by blogs.105

Time magazine concurred with IBM’s analysis and pointed to the same trickle up trend in fashion discussed above.106 However, Time magazine considered Steampunk to still be fixed in the cosplay sphere, an opinion with which I disagree given the overwhelming evidence presented above on Steampunk’s infiltration into numerous other arenas. IBM’s data analysis shows fashion is the driving force behind the current Steampunk trend, and the shift in aesthetics has merged into everyday clothing (fig. 54) and lifestyle.

There is no statistical data available that provides a breakdown in dollars and attendance for various sci-fi sub-genres. During my research, I have found that steampunks manage to fill not only the main hotel where a symposium, con, or fair is held, but several overflow venues are often sold out more than six months prior to the event. A recent article by James Pethokoukis for the news digest, *The Week*, garnered severe criticism. In his article “Why the rise of Cosplay is a Bad Sign for the U.S. Economy” Pethokoukis stated that like the two-decade old stagnant economy experienced by Japanese youth, American youth is also suffering from its “own post-bubble economic funk” and that cosplay was a means of escape from facing the reality of unemployment especially for recent college graduates and that escapism is itself the problem.¹⁰⁷

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Adam Ozimek of *Forbes* magazine disagreed with Pethokoukis on the basis that studies have shown the shift in leisure pursuits for millennials. Where prior generations were more likely to be interested in sports, this generation is more interested in sci-fi or web-based activities, basically nerdy endeavors. Ozimek may have had a point with regard to the shift in interests, but he missed a significant point of contention to Pethokoukis’ claim, in that escapism is not unique to cosplayers. Considering that the average cost to attend a con is upwards of $300, it is not the unemployed or even the underemployed who are engaging in cosplay, but society’s economically productive element. Cosplay is also one version of the twenty-first century’s answer to previous eras’ balls, musicals, house parties, tableaux, and masquerades. Steampunk, a large segment of the cosplay market, is not only fun, but doesn’t limit the participants to cons. We are surrounded by the aesthetic and it shows no signs, as yet, of a downward trend.

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CONCLUSION

“The Industrial Revolution has grown old. So machines that the Romantics considered satanic now look romantic.”

Bruce Sterling\textsuperscript{109}

Steampunk is everywhere and, as demonstrated above, is not without criticism – much of this comes from within the subculture. I’ve discussed, in detail, the DIY ethos and politics of Steampunk writers, artists and maker/tinkerers, but they are actually a minority in the subculture. These are the individuals who constantly ask “where is the punk in Steampunk?” and push for greater political awareness and grassroots involvement to address various social agendas. Catherine Valente certainly had a lot to say about slapping on gears and lacing oneself up in a corset without regard to an agenda, but neither does she provide one. She doesn’t want anyone to forget that Victorian England was “filthy, ugly, euphoric sludge at the bottom of a spoon, because that’s the Victorian Era, that’s steam power…”\textsuperscript{110} Steampunks whether tinkerers, musicians, cosplayers, avid consumers of Steampunk literature, activists etc. or some combination of the above are a literate and socially conscious group. I daresay most steampunks worth their weight in metal gears (available for sale at the nearest craft store) are well aware of exactly how difficult life was in Victorian times. Valente laments the lack of anxiety in Steampunk, but to what end?


\textsuperscript{110} Valente, “Blowing Off Steam,” 61.
In contrast, Andrew O’Neil of The Men Who Will Not Be Blamed For Nothing Troupe, self-publishes a fanzine in which he not only addresses “what is punk about steampunk,” but provides real world, pragmatic solutions. Many of his suggestions have to do with DIY such as “Don’t throw away your holey socks! Stick a tennis ball in them and sew over the gap!”\footnote{Andrew O’Neil, “101 Skills Every Steampunk Should Learn.” Fuck Steampunk: A Periodical for the Disenchanted, (self-published fanzine), 9.} This directive is complete with an illustration (fig. 55) of how to darn socks to assist the vast majority of individuals in the twenty-first century who likely don’t know how to sew. It is individuals like von Slatt, Pho, and O’Neil who provide a platform for those who want to be “[a] force for positive change.”\footnote{O’Neil, Fuck Steampunk, 3.} In reality, most people are simply in it for the fun of cosplay – they enjoy dressing up like aristocrats and getting together for tea duels: the contestant whose tea soaked biscuit is remains intact the longest wins. Some may be bothered by this ‘let’s all feel good’ lack of anxiety, but Steampunk is in part defined by an element of whimsy. Consider the juxtaposition of disparate elements such as Industrial Revolution and Information Age (\textit{Difference Engine}), Victorian fashion and modern technology, or simply the oxymoronic idea of retrofuturism. With this mash-up of various elements what better way to be a steampunk than to combine two quintessentially Victorian pastimes – tea and parlor games.
Another expression of creative whimsy is manifested in the proliferation of steampunked images of public figures. One can perform an internet search on just about any iconic personality and find they’ve received a Steampunk makeover. No one is safe, be it Buddha, Benjamin Franklin, the Mona Lisa, characters from Star Wars, Disney princesses, or current day politicians – they have all been steampunked by artists (figs. 56 and 57). Artists transform these famous images by applying Steampunk elements such as goggles, gears, corsets etc.; fashion thus becomes the defining characteristic of the Steampunk subculture.
Figure 56: Steampunk Disney Princesses

Figure 57: Steampunk Bonaparte
Despite Prasarn’s criticisms of Steampunk’s lack of clear definition, it is apparent based on available evidence that Steampunk is a subculture unified by fashion. However, ground rules such as those relating to time and place, music, art, literature or political agenda are otherwise mutable. Steampunk fashion appeals to steampunks and designers alike because of the ability to express creativity without suffering from constraints of societal dress norms. “Fashion is not a thing or an essence. Rather, it is a social process of negotiation and navigation through the murky and yet-hopeful waters of what is to come. Fashion involves becoming collectively with others,”¹¹³ and steampunk does this through exploration of ‘what-if?’ Fashion design seeks to tell a story or express a message through clothing and almost no subculture enables storytelling as freely as steampunk.

¹¹³ Kaiser, Fashion and Culture Studies, 1.
APPENDIX A: A TIMELINE OF SELECT STEAMPUNK MOMENTS

1870: *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, sci-fi novel by Jules Verne is published, a precursor to Steampunk literature.
1895: *Time Machine*, sci-fi novel by H.G. Wells is published, also considered a precursor to Steampunk literature.
1954: *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, sci-fi film produced by Walt Disney, considered by many to be the first visualization of Steampunk style.
1971: *The Warlord of the Air*, sci-fi novel by Michael is published, considered to be proto-steampunk because speculative fiction set in the Victorian era was not yet a fully formed sub-genre of sci-fi.
1987: K.W. Jeter ‘coins’ the term Steampunk to define the speculative fiction set in the Victorian era written by himself, Powers and Baylock.
1990: *Difference Engine*, sci-fi novel by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, considered to be one of the best example of the genre.
1990: *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright*, comic by Bruce Talbot is published.
1993: *Sebastian O*, comic by Grant Morrison and Steve Yeowell is published.
1995: *The Steampunk Trilogy* by Paul Di Filippo is published, the first time the term ‘Steampunk’ is used in a title.
1995: *City of Lost Children*, sci-fi film with Steampunk costumes design by Jean-Paul Gaultier.
2003: Kit Stølen’s Steampunk photos goes viral.
2007: *SteamPunk Magazine* is published as an online magazine.
2007: Sean Orlando unveils *Steampunk Treehouse* at Burning Man.
2007: Ralph Lauren’s Spring/Summer 2008 collection show.
2007: *Golden Compass*, film with Steampunk aesthetics.
2008: *New York Times* publishes an article on Steampunk.
2009: *Sherlock Holmes*, film with Steampunk aesthetics.
2011: *Steampunk Bible* is published, features Steampunk various sub-genres of Steampunk.
2012: Prada Men’s Fall/Winter 2012 collection.
2013: Alexander McQueen, Spring/Summer 2013 collection.
APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY

**Anime.** A term reserved for Japanese animated films, hand-drawn or computer generated.  

**Cons.** Short for convention, usually only popular culture conventions are referred to as such.

**Cosplay.** A blend of the two words costume and play.

**DIY.** Do-it-yourself.

**LARP.** Live Action Role Play, individuals physically act out the roles of their characters.


**Luther.** *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright*, comic (1990).

**Maker/Tinkerer.** Individuals who craft utilitarian, usually one of a kind, objects.

**Manga.** Comics published in Japan.

**Multiverse.** A hypothetical set of infinite universes, parallel or otherwise.

**Neo-Victorianism.** Evokes the nineteenth century.

**OED.** Oxford English Dictionary.

**Retro-Futurism.** The present imagining how the past would have imagined the future.

**Sci-fi.** Short for Science Fiction

**SPWS.** Steampunk Workshop, a blog maintained by Jake von Slatt that features Steampunk DIY projects, art, music, literature.

**Steampunks.** Those who adhere to the Steampunk philosophy of DIY and sustainability.

**Steamsona.** Steampunk persona, steampunks create their own characters often based on personal interests and ethnicity.

**Steamverse.** A Steampunk universe.

**Straights.** Non-steampunks, or individuals who don't know about steampunk.

**Techno-fantasy.** Technology that is imagined or futuristic technology imagined to exist in the past.

**Victorian.** Steampunk literature, art, fashion etc. might reference any point of time between the years 1820-1914. This span of almost 100 years is specifically termed Georgian/Regency (pre-1837), Victorian (1837-1901), Edwardian (1901-1914) among other sub-categories related to various socio-political movements. The term Victorian has come to generally denote a certain social and cultural ideology that roughly traverses this period. For purposes of this paper, Victorian indicates the ideology rather than precisely delineated years.

**WWW.** *Wild Wild West*, film (1999)
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHY

Samantha Mall Viksnins received her Bachelor of Science in Finance from George Mason University in 2005. A Certified Public Accountant and Certified Fraud Examiner, Samantha was most recently employed as a management consultant at a Big Four accounting firm. Prior to that, she was a professional in the visual media. Samantha has travelled extensively in Asia and Europe. Through these experiences she has gained valuable and significant cultural insights earning her the sobriquet, world citizen.