

# Is A Tech Winter Looming?

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With AI bouncing around the world like a kid on a sugar high and the fever pitched proclamations of the technorati claiming technology is changing everything, everywhere, all at once, it may seem odd to talk about a technology winter. But one may well be coming. Why?

Much of my work is helping organisations understand how, why and where humans and culture use technology. Through UX research and netnography. I've enjoyed living through a few hype cycles and even launching technology products in these hype cycles, taking advantage of them. One gets a sense of how these things unfold.

Then there's the [recent article](#) by Rodney Brooks, the founder of iRobot with its best known product, Roomba, skittering about houses around the world. He believes a technology winter may be coming and more so for Artificial Intelligence. There have been discussions of a tech backlash as well. Other bright minds are beginning to think we've plateaued for some technologies.

While it is impossible to predict an absolute tech winter, there are signals in the noise that suggest something is happening. I believe this is the invisible hand of culture coupled with the deflating balloon of hype around AI, economically and culturally.

You might be one of many who are dazzled by the idea of self-driving cars in big cities from the USA to China. Except there are no self-driving cars. Peel back the curtain of the so-called autonomous cars and you'll quickly find a lot of humans very much in the loop. GM's Cruise service has shut down because it was expensive with no profitability in sight and it confirmed its robotaxis [relied on human](#) input every half mile or so.

There are all kinds of flying car prototypes flittering about fields and beaches. But they remain very expensive and rather clunky. They'll get better. Eventually.

Generative AI such as ChatGPT and Claude were going to change everything. They haven't. They're very good tools to enhance knowledge workers in terms of productivity, but not much more. Disenchantment with GAI has begun to grow. This is okay because it means culture is figuring out how GA will actually work. This takes more time than AI industry leaders would like.

The social media industry giants are facing a generational change in the use of their tools. And the invisible hand of society is pushing back. Meta is facing a number of lawsuits. Twitter, uh, X, has seen its valuation plummet. People are seeking more private social media apps, Gen Alpha just isn't that interested in much of social media.

What's at work here, I propose, is that we're seeing what has always happened with significant technological impacts on sociocultural systems for thousands of years. Culture is beginning to change the technologies that changed society.

Some pundits, among them Marshall McLuhan, have stated that technology shapes us and changes us. This is true. But then, as a culture changes due to technologies, culture then begins to re-shape these technologies. To create new norms, values and behaviours as it learns and begins to see the good and bad aspects of technologies.

Culture is humanity's most powerful force. When humans form larger societies, culture is the system we use to shape, run and evolve our societies. No technology has ever won out against culture. Technologies become better because of culture. The bad aspects that don't work are, over time, stripped away

and culture sets the new rules. This is when the best innovations with technology happen because they're innovations that culture wants.

So what we may be seeing is, in economic terms for tech industries, a winter, but for broader society, more of a shaping event. Socioculturally, the dazzling promises of technologies like self-driving cars, flying cars, AI, Virtual and Augmented Reality, Web3, crypto, blockchain, have been disappointing.

Culture has become frustrated with the [bombardment of ads](#) across all digital platforms. The rampant abuse of personal data by some of these platforms and the deep commercialization of almost every aspect of our digital lives.

As culture begins to push back, it will present exciting new opportunities for innovators. New business models will emerge. Regulations and laws are beginning to evolve, not as the technorati think, to stop innovation, but rather in response to civil society, the invisible hand, reacting to its disappointments and wanting to make technology better.

This is the amazing wonder of human culture at work. It never happens overnight. It is a long, slow, twisty, topsy turvy road with a lot of bumps along the way. The end result however, has always been the betterment of technology and improvement in the human condition.