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Vaporwave is a microgenre of electronic music and a subgenre of Hauntology, a visual art style, and an Internet meme that emerged in the early 2010s,[25][26] and became well-known in 2015.[27] It is defined partly by its slowed-down, chopped and screwed samples of smooth jazz, 1970s elevator music,[27] R&B, and lounge music from the 1980s and 1990s. The surrounding subculture is sometimes associated with an ambiguous or satirical take on consumer capitalism and pop culture, and tends to be characterized by a nostalgic or surrealist engagement with the popular entertainment, technology and advertising of previous decades. Visually, it incorporates early Internet imagery, late 1990s web design, glitch art, anime, stylized Greek sculptures, 3D-rendered objects, and cyberpunk tropes in its cover artwork and music videos.

Following the wider exposure of vaporwave in 2012, a wealth of subgenres and offshoots emerged, such as future funk, mallsoft and hardvapour, although most have waned in popularity.[29] The genre also intersected with fashion trends such as streetwear and various political movements. Since the mid-2010s, vaporwave has been frequently described as a “dead” genre.[30] The general public came to view vaporwave as a facetious Internet meme, a notion that frustrated some producers who wished to be recognized as serious artists. Many of the most influential artists and record labels associated with vaporwave have since drifted into other musical styles.[29] Later in the 2010s, the genre spurred a revival of interest in Japanese ambient music and city pop.[31]

## Key Characteristics



Vaporwave is a hyper-specific subgenre, or “microgenre”,<sup>[32]</sup> that is both a form of electronic music and an art style, although it is sometimes suggested to be primarily a visual medium.<sup>[33]</sup> The genre is defined largely by its surrounding subculture,<sup>[34]</sup> with its music inextricable from its visual accoutrements.<sup>[33]</sup> Academic Laura Glitsos writes, “In this way, vaporwave defies traditional music conventions that typically privilege the music over the visual form.”<sup>[33]</sup> Musically, vaporwave reconfigures dance music from the 1980s and early 1990s<sup>[6]</sup> through the use of chopped and screwed techniques, repetition, and heavy reverb.<sup>[33]</sup> It is composed almost entirely from slowed-down samples<sup>[3]</sup> and its creation requires only the knowledge of rudimentary production techniques.<sup>[35]</sup> Although, some artists like Dan Mason create vaporwave music from scratch.<sup>[36]</sup>

The name derives from “vaporware”, a term for commercial software that is announced but never released.<sup>[34]</sup> It builds upon the satirical tendencies of chillwave and hypnagogic pop, while also being associated with an ambiguous or ironic take on consumer capitalism and technoculture.<sup>[3]</sup> Critic Adam Trainer writes of the style’s predilection for “music made less for enjoyment than for the regulation of mood”, such as corporate stock music for infomercials and product demonstrations.<sup>[37]</sup> Academic Adam Harper described the typical vaporwave track as “a wholly synthesised or heavily processed chunk of corporate mood music, bright and earnest or slow and sultry, often beautiful, either looped out of sync and beyond the point of functionality.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Adding to its dual engagement with musical and visual art forms, vaporwave embraces the Internet as a cultural, social, and aesthetic medium.<sup>[34]</sup> The visual aesthetic (often stylized as “ ”, with fullwidth characters)





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## Origins

Vaporwave originated on the Internet in the early 2010s as an ironic variant of chillwave[41] and as a derivation of the work of hypnagogic pop artists such as Ariel Pink and James Ferraro, who were also characterized by the invocation of retro popular culture.[42] It was one of many Internet microgenres to emerge in this era, alongside witch house, seapunk, shitgaze, cloud rap, and others. Early cloud rap artists like Bones, 10's Bambino, and GothBoiClique especially drew heavily on vaporwave and witch house, with genre boundaries not becoming distinctly defined until later.[43][44] Vaporwave coincided with a broader trend involving young artists whose works drew from their childhoods in the 1980s.[45][nb 2]

"Chillwave" and "hypnagogic pop" were coined at virtually the same time, in mid-2009, and were considered interchangeable terms. Like vaporwave, they engaged with notions of nostalgia and cultural memory.[46] Among the earliest hypnagogic acts to anticipate vaporwave was Matrix Metals and his album *Flamingo Breeze* (2009), which was built on synthesizer loops.[47] Around the same time, Daniel Lopatin (Oneohtrix Point Never) uploaded a collection of plunderphonics loops to YouTube surreptitiously under the alias sunsetcorp.[29] These clips were taken from his audio-visual album *Memory Vague* (June 2009).[35][nb 3] Washed Out's "Feel It All Around" (June 2009), which slowed down the 1983 Italian dance song "I Want You" by Gary Low, exemplified the "analog nostalgia" of chillwave that vaporwave artists sought to reconfigure.[6]



Vaporwave was subsumed under a larger "Tumblr aesthetic" that had become fashionable in underground digital music and art scenes of the 2010s.[49] In 2010, Lopatin included several of the tracks from *Memory Vague*, as well as a few new ones, on his album *Chuck Person's EccoJams Vol. 1*, released in August under the alias "Chuck Person".[50] With packaging that resembled the 1993 video game *Ecco the Dolphin*, the album inspired a host of suburban teens and young adults to formulate what would become vaporwave.[5] Seapunk followed in mid-2011 as an aquatic-themed Tumblr subculture and Internet meme[51] that presaged vaporwave in its concern for "spacey" electronic music and Geocities web graphics.[11] Like vaporwave, it was defined by its engagement with the Internet, an approach that is sometimes described as post-Internet.[15]

The musical template for vaporwave came from *EccoJams* and Ferraro's *Far Side Virtual* (October 2011).[39][14][52] *EccoJams* featured chopped and screwed variations on popular 1980s pop songs,[5] while *Far Side Virtual* drew primarily on "the grainy and bombastic beeps" of past media such as Skype and the Nintendo Wii.[39] According to Stereogum's Miles Bowe, vaporwave was a fusion between Lopatin's "chopped and screwed plunderphonics" and the "nihilistic easy-listening of James Ferraro's Muzak-hellscapes".[10] A 2013 post on a music blog presented those albums, along with Skeleton's *Holograms* (November 2010), as "proto vaporwave".[50]

## Early Scene

Vaporwave artists were originally "mysterious and often nameless entities that lurk the internet," Adam Harper noted, "often behind a pseudo-corporate name or web façade, and whose music is typically free to download through Mediafire, Last FM, Soundcloud or Bandcamp." [3] According to *Metallic Ghosts* (Chaz Allen), the original vaporwave scene came out of an online circle formulated on the site *Turntable.fm*. This circle included individuals known as Internet Club (Robin Burnett), Veracom, Luxury Elite, Infinity Frequencies, Transmuteo (Jonathan Dean), Coolmemoryz, and Prismcorp.[53]

The cover artwork for *Floral Shoppe* (2011) by Macintosh Plus features elements that would come to exemplify the vaporwave aesthetic, including retro computer imagery, Japanese lettering, and pixelated graphics.[22] Numerous pro-



butters of this online film took inspiration from Ramona Xavier's New Dreams Ltd. [credited to "Laserdisc Visions", July 2011].<sup>[53]</sup> The first reported use of the term "vaporwave" was on an October 2011 blogpost by an anonymous user reviewing the album *Surf's Pure Hearts* by Girlhood,<sup>[34]</sup> however, Burnett has been credited with coining the term as a way to tie the circle together.<sup>[53]</sup> Xavier's *Floral Shoppe* [credited to "Macintosh Plus", December 2011] was the first album to be properly considered of the genre, containing all of the style's core elements.<sup>[22]</sup>

Vaporwave found wider appeal over the middle of 2012, building an audience on sites like Last.fm, Reddit and 4chan.<sup>[53]</sup> On Tumblr, it became common for users to decorate their pages with vaporwave imagery.<sup>[49]</sup> In September, Blank Banshee released



his debut album, *Blank Banshee 0*, which reflected a trend of vaporwave producers who were more influenced by trap music and less concerned with conveying political undertones.<sup>[22]</sup> Bandwagon called it a "progressive record" that, along with *Floral Shoppe*, "signaled the end of the first wave of sample-heavy music, and ... reconfigured what it means to make vaporwave music."<sup>[5]</sup>

After a flood of new vaporwave acts turned to Bandcamp for distribution, various online music publications such as *Tiny Mix Tapes*, *Dummy Mag* and *Sputnikmusic* began covering the movement.<sup>[14]</sup> However, writers, fans, and artists struggled to differentiate between vaporwave, chillwave, and hypnagogic pop,<sup>[54]</sup> while Ash Becks of *The Essential* noted that larger sites like *Pitchfork* and *Drowned in Sound* "seemingly refused to touch vaporwave throughout the genre's two-year 'peak'."<sup>[14]</sup> Common criticisms were that the genre was "too dumb" or "too intellectual"

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## Widespread Popularity

In November 2012, seapunk aesthetics were appropriated in music videos by the pop singers Rihanna and Azealia Banks. The exposure catapulted the subculture to the mainstream, and with it, vaporwave.<sup>[56]</sup> That same month, a video review of *Floral Shoppe*, published by the YouTuber Anthony Fantano, helped solidify the album as the representative work of vaporwave,<sup>[57]</sup> but was also credited as a pivotal moment in the decline of the genre.<sup>[58]</sup> Soon after vaporwave was spotlighted in the mainstream, it was frequently described as a "dead" genre.<sup>[30]</sup> Such pronouncements came from the fans themselves.<sup>[22]</sup>

Following the initial wave, new terms were invented by users on 4chan and Reddit who sought to separate vaporwave into multiple subgenres.<sup>[29]</sup> Some were created in jest, such as "vapor-trap", "vapornoise" and "vaporgoth".<sup>[20]</sup> Further subgenres included "ecco jams", "utopian virtual", "mallsoft", "future funk", "post-Internet", "late-night lo-fi", "broken transmission" (or "signalwave"), and "hardvapour".<sup>[59]</sup> Joe Price of *Complex* reported that "most [of the subgenres] faded away, and many didn't make sense to begin with. ... The visual aspect formed faster than the sound, resulting in releases that look the same but fail to form a sonically cohesive whole."<sup>[29]</sup>

Yung Lean [pictured 2013] popularized fusions of vaporwave with rap music.<sup>[60][61]</sup>

In 2013, YouTube began allowing its users to host live streams, which resulted in a host of 24-hour "radio stations" dedicated to microgenres such as vaporwave and lo-fi hip hop.<sup>[62]</sup> The Swedish rapper Yung Lean and his Sad Boys collective inspired a wave of anonymous DJs to create vaporwave mixes, uploaded to YouTube and SoundCloud, that appropriated the music and imagery of Nintendo 64 video games. Titles included "Mariowave", "Nostalgia 64",



as accessories, sportswear brands, Arizona iced tea, and the uncanny ability to simultaneously communicate in and be a meme.”[64][nb 5]

At the end of 2013, Thump published an essay headlined “Is Vaporwave the Next Seapunk?”.[29] Although the author prophesied that vaporwave would not end “as a joke” the way seapunk did, the genre came to be largely viewed as a facetious Internet meme based predominately on a retro visual style or “vibe”, a notion that frustrated some producers who wished to be recognized as serious artists. Many of the most influential artists and record labels associated with the genre later drifted into other musical styles.[29]

In 2015, Rolling Stone published a list that included vaporwave act 2814 as one of “10 artists you need to know”, citing their album *Birth of a New Day* ( ) as “an unparalleled success within a small, passionate pocket of the internet.”[66] The album *I’ll Try Living Like This* by Death’s Dynamic Shroud.wmv was featured at number fifteen on the Fact list “The 50 Best Albums of 2015”,[67] and on the same day MTV International introduced a rebrand heavily inspired by vaporwave and seapunk,[68] Tumblr launched a TV viewer named Tumblr TV, with an explicitly M-styled visual spin.[69] Hip-hop artist Drake’s single “Hotline Bling”, released on July 31, also became popular with vaporwave producers, inspiring both humorous and serious remixes of the tune.[5]

As of 2016, vaporwave albums, including *Floral Shoppe*, continued to rank among the best-selling experimental albums on Bandcamp.[17] The scene maintained a dedicated following on communities such as Reddit.[29] Price reported that, outside of these arenas, the genre was generally considered to be “a big joke”. He added “Users of the various vaporwave sub-Reddits always take it very seriously for the most part, but even there people are discussing whether or not vaporwave is still going strong.”[29][nb 6] Despite their objections to the label, serious artists of the movement continued to be tagged as vaporwave.[70]

In 2019, user comments that state “A E S T H E T I C” remained ubiquitous on YouTube videos concerning the Internet.[71] George Clanton, a prominent figure in the genre, commented that the “vaporwave” banner still functioned well as a marketing tag for music that is not necessarily considered of the genre.[70][72] In September, he organized the first-ever vaporwave festival, 100% ElectroniCON, in New York City, where various artists associated with the genre such as Saint Pepsi, Vaperror, Nmesh, 18 Carat Affair, and Clanton himself performed live, most of them for the first time in their careers.[55][72]



**Source:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vapor-wave](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaporwave)