



Vaporwave

Home

Legacy

Present

Sources

Intro

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.



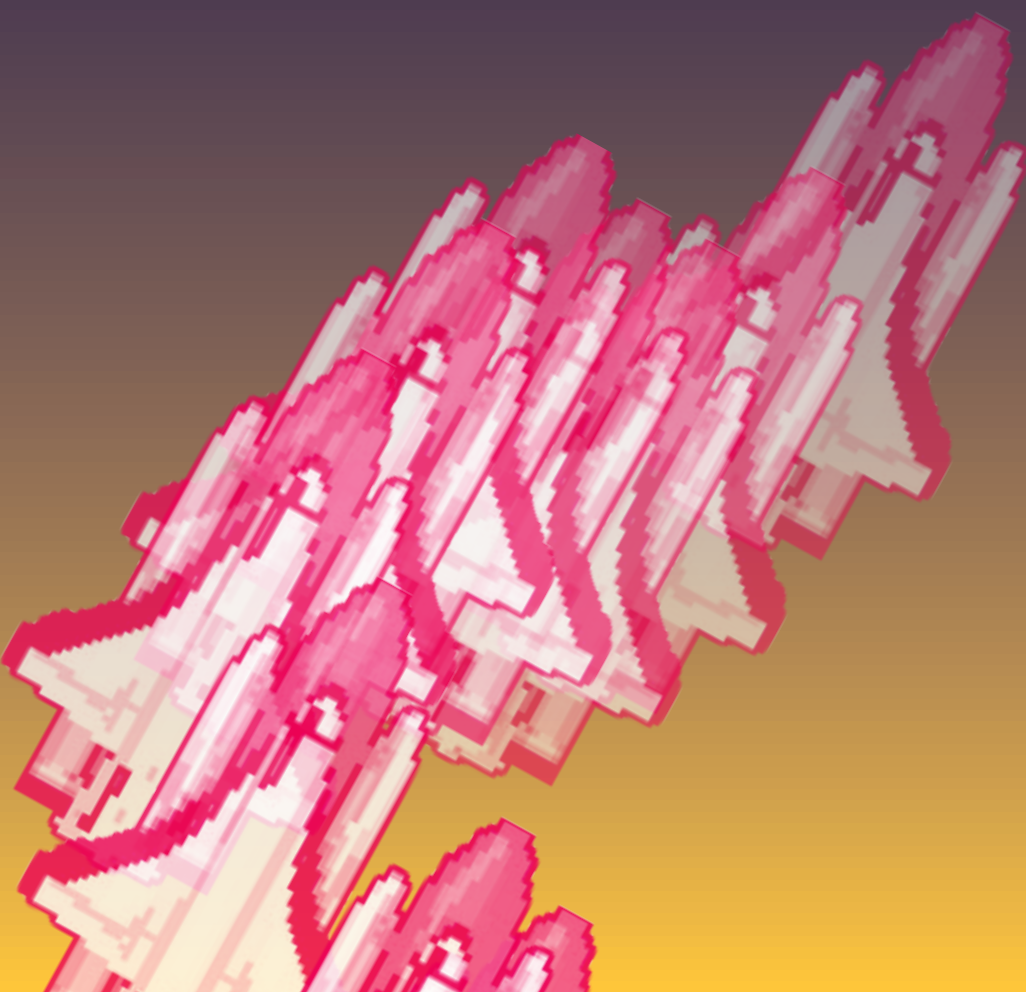
Following the wider exposure of vaporwave in 2012, a wealth of subgenres and offshoots emerged, such as future funk, mallsoft and hardvapour, although most have waned in popularity.[29] The genre also intersected with fashion trends such as streetwear and various political movements. Since the mid-2010s, 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”,^[32] that is both a form of electronic music and an art style, although it is sometimes suggested to be primarily a visual medium.^[33] The genre is defined largely by its surrounding subculture,^[34] with its music inextricable from its visual accoutrements.^[33] Academic Laura Glitsos writes, “In this way, vaporwave defies traditional music conventions that typically privilege the music over the visual form.”^[33] Musically, vaporwave reconfigures dance music from the 1980s and early 1990s^[6] through the use of chopped and screwed techniques, repetition, and heavy reverb.^[33] It is composed almost entirely from slowed-down samples^[3] and its creation requires only the knowledge of rudimentary production techniques.^[35] Although, some artists like Dan Mason create vaporwave music from scratch.^[36]

The name derives from “vaporware”, a term for commercial software that is announced but never released.^[34] 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.^[3] 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.^[37] 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.”^[3]

Adding to its dual engagement with musical and visual art forms, vaporwave embraces the Internet as a cultural, social, and aesthetic medium.



Home

Legacy

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Sources



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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, 90’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]

Home

Legacy

Present

Sources



Home
Legacy
Present
Sources

and “ [63] Dazed Digital’s Evelyn Wang credited Lean with “allowing vaporwave to leak IRL [and] encouraging its unholy coupling with street-wear”. She cited their associated fashion staples as “frowny faces, Japanese and Arabic 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 head-lined “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 GIF viewer named Tumblr TV, with an explicitly MTV-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 also maintained a dedicated following on communities such as Reddit.[29] Price reported that, for those outside of these arenas, the genre was generally considered to be “a big joke”. He added that “Users of the various vaporwave sub-Reddits will 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 vapor-wave 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]