**Retro-modernist aesthetics and the use of futurist nostalgia**

The goal of our assignment was to create a work of the year 2200. Therefore, it consists of two subtasks. The first is inventing an artwork that could be created a century from now: what will be the issues that concern us? Where are we heading from our current societal developments? To what extent is a future beyond our lifespan imaginable and possible to concretize? The second subtask is finding an accurate medium to create this work with. Since there is no doubt – or at least it is foreseeable – that the current pace of innovation and reinvention will continue and even accelerate, it seems practically impossible to use these future media with the present resources. Will the use of screens (laptops, televisions, phones) persist, or will it be replaced by another medium? Are websites soon to be nostalgia or does the internet and our current uses of it – like the art of printing – form a medium that will not disappear? Imagining a future artwork with our current material context, we have no choice but to use ‘old’ technologies to imitate impending technologies.

An intriguing parallel is found in the Vaporwave aesthetics that emerged in the 2010s. It is in itself contradictory: Vaporwave merges the pixelated images of the early days of the internet with hyperrealist backgrounds, historical figures (like Greek statues) with expressions of the consumerist culture. It is at the same time strange and familiar. From these confrontations, it creates a view of the future. This oxymoron of retro-modernist aesthetics returns in our assignment. From the viewpoint of the year 2200, the artwork we can create will inevitably be old-fashioned and nostalgic in terms of materials, and modern in terms of ideology and society. Through the metaphorical vaporwave aesthetics, it was my intention to shape these possible future ways of thinking – in this case our view on meat consumption and animal well-being.

Simultaneously, Vaporwave is a meme. It is as sarcastic towards social and political tendencies as it is a serious aesthetical expression of musicians and webdesigners. In pastel colors and repetitive synth sounds, Vaporwave addresses the artificiality of the consumerist culture. In 2013, Vice’s Michelle Lhooq put it like this[[1]](#footnote-1): “[I]t has a deliberate affiliation with technocapitalism driven by a subversive political objective: undermining the iron grip of global capitalism by exposing the alienating emptiness underneath its uncanny sheen.” A fake archive seems like a fitting expression of these sentiments: are we taking the future and its fundaments seriously?

This, however, provokes another thought: how are these (current and future) aesthetics connected to our matters and ideologies? Will we shape this new information in sober and professional websites, or will we evolve to a more detached and sensorial use of digital time and space? It seems conflicting to shape a discussion about prospective (retrospective in terms of the website) alternatives for the meat industry in vaporwave aesthetics.

Lastly, the term ‘vaporwave’ is derived from a word used in the tech industry, ‘vaporware’: “a product, hardware or software, that is announced but has not been produced and may never be released. It implies that the product (ware) is all in smoke (vapor)”. The aesthetic not only reminds us of past technologies and evokes nostalgic sentiments, but it also shows that the future, however greatly thought-out, might not exist. As a mere exploration of possible landscapes, societies and artforms, this fake digital archive in vaporwave style is attentive to the gaps: looking into the future and at the same time looking back, this nostalgia might not exist.

Also: maybe slaughterhouses should stop existing, no?

1. https://web.archive.org/web/20140426034616/http://thump.vice.com/words/is-vaporwave-the-next-seapunk [↑](#footnote-ref-1)