



CONTENTS

02. What Happened?

The argument still stands, is Vaporwave dead? Was Vaporwave ever even really living? Or is this internet meme a real cultural transition?

04. Things Fade.

Just like every good trend, there is always an end in sight. So, did Vaporwave fade away with the rest of the crowd?

07. Aesthetic.

Colour palettes of neon hues paired with glitch-core textures are accompanied by Greek statues and internet memes.

08. No Mercy.

All the cool kids are doing it. Before you decide to remove the internet from your home, and hide the screens from your kids, read this.

09. Culture.

The internet is the easiest way to start a trend. So where does that recognisable aesthetic originate?

10. The Rise.

Plagued by stereotypes and obligations, the societal perceptions of Vaporwave will not only be the rise, but could it also be the fall?



Writing about vaporwave in 2016 is almost impossible. Neophytes often seem baffled by the genre, assuming they've heard of it at all. Meanwhile, fans insist that vaporwave is dead. How do you write about music that most people have never heard of and that fans claim doesn't exist any more? Or just as important: why?

WHAT HAPPENED TO VAPORWAVE?

THINGS FADE.

If you've never heard of vaporwave, the slowdown, remixed, and appropriative music genre defined at least in part by an obsession with '80s and '90s consumer culture—the first genre to be born and live its life entirely on the Internet—that's certainly OK. In fact, it's sort of the point. Vaporwave, itself a kind of musical parody of pop consciousness, never strived for mass appeal. It doesn't need our validation. That's true for any artifact of counterculture: mass acceptance would weaken its claim to authenticity. Forcing it into a form fit

for mass appeal would dilute its identity. For an historical example, think of the music critic Lester Bangs' quote about how the '60s died as soon as it was OK to have long hair in the Midwest. That's why signal-boosting vaporwave might seem gauche to some fans and creators. Purveyors of a genre so rarified were almost obligated to bury it alive, to announce its death publicly before its actual time. It seems almost prudent to end the project while the relatively small groups of people passionate about vaporwave are still able to police the borders of the genre's identity.

物事は衰退する

But the reasons for vaporwave being created in the first place are still very much relevant: about capitalism, sarcastic takes on the unachieved utopias of previous decades, consumerism, escapism, globalization, etc. Vaporwave's vision isn't exhausted yet, which keeps it fresh, pertinent, and growing in the form of fractured subgenres like “future funk” and “mall soft”. So vaporwave is dead. Long live vaporwave. Pick any single point in time that a music genre developed is a kind of arbitrary exercise. In the case of vaporwave, do we go back to underground electronic music in Detroit in the '80s?



PURGATORY



とノスタルジックでかなりアンダグラウンがになっていた

VAPORWAVE

A E S T H E T I C

Visual jokes, of course—little tiny ghosts of the failed promises of consumerism (were we ever really going to find true happiness in a bottle of iced tea?), its cheapness and vulgarity—that point us towards where the name “vaporwave” itself comes from. Like the music, the name is a hybrid. It’s a combination of the term “vaporware,” a corporate advertising term for products that are advertised for release but are never actually intended to make it to market. Half of the genre’s name comes from an insider term for manipulation of the public’s desires.



If you look at something pink and teal with a marble classical bust and a glitchy Windows 95 logo, you’re probably looking at a vaporwave aesthetic. If you’re watching a YouTube with a title written in soothing stretched out font, you’re probably watching a vaporwave aesthetic.



If you haven’t guessed by now, vaporwave is a bit of a joke, or more accurately, an internet meme. Vaporwave’s trippy immediate artistic ancestor “seapunk” was a running inside joke on Tumblr during 2011 about fashion and art and music inspired by the ocean.



The exact difference between seapunk and vaporwave is blurry, but as far as I understand vaporwave trades the aquatic focus for a fascination with emptiness of aging amateur glossy commercialism. It’s the music playing infomercial public access purgatory.

NO MERCY, NO REDEMPTION.



C O N D E M N

Vaporwave started to blossom around the early 2010s; and like all new things that are difficult to describe, some people's explanations of what the Vaporwave phenomenon was were indeed a bit dismissive. Internet users were quick to proclaim that "Vaporwave is Dead" or that Vaporwave is "just a meme" yet these classifications failed to give the stylized

R E P E N T

genre a place in the history of important and meaningful art movements of modern history. If examined properly, Vaporwave can actually enhance our lives. When Vaporwave is dismissed as a "meme", it fails to fully encompass what Vaporwave is and more importantly, fails to acknowledge the potential Vaporwave has to be.



S A V I O U R

Vaporwave tends to dissolve social class structures, as it makes the archival practice accessible and instead focuses on the commonality between all diverse groups. There was a shared, forgotten past among east and west, and even in the increased speed of technology and business; there is a common desire for slowness, while meditating on our fondest memories.



ミームまたは文化

CULTURE

I N F L U E N C E S

One of the largest cultural influencers of the past two decades has been the internet. While techno music has reflected machinery's impact on society since the 1980s, the internet is a different beast with unique artistic needs. If you're in the mood for music for today's meme-filled online world, throw yourself to the currents of "vaporwave."

What does today look like? The 1950s had a look. The 1960s had a look. The 1970s definitely had a look. But it seems like society left distinctive cultural style behind at the new millennium along with the monoculture. There's a reason why no one guessed 2011 film *The Final Destination* was actually set in 2000.

Aside from the technology, the two years don't immediately look all that different, and some say tech is to blame. To make complex new tech more approachable, designers tend to employ real-world analogues like the desktop metaphor on computers or a note-taking app modeled after a physical notepad.

But while that does help the progress of technology, it also tethers us to aging visual language and slows down that language's evolution. Combine that with the sweet temptation of nostalgia and we're basically running in a stylistic circle. Vaporwave was born from this loop.



THE RISE AND THE FALL.

Almost everything that can be said about it has already been written or blogged about somewhere online since its early inception around 2010. Countless articles will flood your search pages all theorizing on either the intense faux-philosophical undertones of the music or some pseudo-intellectual analysis of the artwork that permeates the genre like a parasitic neon haze that suffocates your eyes. Plagued by stereotypes, endlessly recycled imagery, and sonic characteristics being over-used to the point of exhaustion, many seem to have become disenchanted with the state of the fading art movement which in a way fulfills the bleak mentality it once heralded.

Having become more focused on personality as opposed to anonymity, Vaporwave has become a parody of a parody, creating an infinite loop of irony that leaves behind the awe it once generated replacing it instead with endless memes of pastel gradients, Roman busts, and 3D coke cans. It's been over a decade since it sprang into existence and now it seems to be struggling to find what made it special in the first place all while battling the disarray and despair of an increasingly toxic fanbase that is no longer excited but rather obligated to cheer it on. Today's Vaporwave scene is in a constant flux of contentious debate on authenticity, originality, and a tug-of-war between small and big labels.



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RESOURCES

Original Photography

Original photography by Hayley Colla. Photographed in the Geelong & Surf Coastal region.

Photography Edits

Original photography edits were made using a combination of Adobe Photoshop & Illustrator.

Graphic Illustrations

Original graphic illustrations by Hayley Colla. Using a combination of reference images, Adobe Illustrator & Photoshop.

Stock Resources

Stock textures & images were referenced from Freepik, Pexels & Freejct. Edits made by Hayley Colla.

Place Holder Text

Place holder text sourced from Sabukaru & Esquire.

<https://sabukaru.online/about> & <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/music/a47793/what-happened-to-vaporwave/>

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