

And Plato said: Simulacrum

A (semi)serious investigation into Future Funk

Introduction

Future Funk is a musical genre that blends elements of 70s and 80s funk and disco music with contemporary electronic music influences, creating a unique sonic experience. To a casual listener the genre may appear light and superficial, but actually it has deep roots in musical culture and reflects an evolution in the way society interprets and consumes music.

The origins of Future Funk can be traced back to 2000s Japan, when some music producers began sampling old funk and disco vinyl, adding contemporary electronic beats. The genre quickly gained popularity thanks to the Internet.

The Deep Roots and Sources of Inspiration: A Journey into the Past

Artists like Parliament-Funkadelic, James Brown and Earth, Wind & Fire, to name a few, have created a distinctive sound characterized by punchy rhythms, very groovy bass lines and infectious melodies. Future Funk draws on these musical traditions, reinterpreting and revitalizing the sound of classic funk for a contemporary audience.

Future Funk also draws inspiration from 70s and 80s disco. Artists like Chic and Donna Summer, just to name two, have helped define the taste of an entire generation of musicians, characterized by danceable rhythms and luxurious arrangements. These elements are now reused, thus obtaining a contemporary dancefloor dimension with clear references to the productions of that era.

A less conventional but equally important source of inspiration is the Japanese City Pop of the 1980s. A blend of Western pop, jazz and soul with sophisticated production and elaborate melodies. Artists like Tatsuro Yamashita, Mariya Takeuchi and Anri have created songs that, after having fallen into oblivion for decades, see the light again through sampling. An evocative bridge is created between past and present.

The great influence of contemporary electronic music is also undeniable. The abundant use of effects, the speeding up of the tracks tempo and the use of rhythmic and percussion elements typical of less extreme EDM are among the founding and indispensable elements of the genre.

Future Funk is characterized by a series of distinctive elements that make it immediately recognisable:

- *Samples*: The use of samples is one of the main characteristics of Future Funk. These samples are reworked in many ways, filtered and resynced to create new tracks. They represent the very essence of the genre.
- *Syncopated rhythms*: The rhythms are generally syncopated and lively, with a heavy use of drum machines and electronic beats. As for the speed of the songs, it is often set to 128 bpm, which is the tempo of a lot of contemporary dance music.
- *Melodies and Catchy Riffs*: Future Funk melodies are catchy and often repetitive, designed to be instantly recognisable. There is a tendency to keep only the most effective parts of the songs that are reused.
- *Lo-fi production*: Many tracks feature deliberately lo-fi production, with "dirty" and extremely compressed sounds that evoke a feeling of nostalgia. The songs are produced for the web and not to be played on the radio or recorded on physical media. The low definition is necessary as a sign of the past time and as evidence of the use of musical "debris".

Structure of the Songs and Instruments Used

Future Funk tracks can follow a traditional pop structure, with verses, choruses and bridges. However, the production is heavily based on sampling and digital editing, meaning that each artist creates according to their own taste and intentions. The most used tools include:

- *Drum machines*: to create precise and syncopated electronic rhythms. Artists tend to use the most frequent rhythmic figuration in dance music, the "four-on-the-floor", in which the kick is present at every beat throughout the song.
- *Synthesizers*: to add harmonic and melodic textures.
- *Samplers*: to manipulate existing song fragments and create new compositions.
- *Funky and groovy basslines*: often made with synthetic basses or samples of pre-existing bass lines.
- *DAW (Digital Audio Workstation)*: an essential element intrinsically linked to the genre itself. Software dedicated to audio productions, usable on PC and Mac. To name a few of the most used: Ableton Live, Logic Pro, Cubase and Reaper. Easily accessible online at an affordable cost.

Evolution of the genre over time

Since its birth, funk has undergone several evolutions. In the early years, as previously mentioned, the focus was mainly on sampling disco, funk and city pop songs. Over time, more research-oriented producers began to explore different influences and incorporate elements of other electronic genres. This evolution led to further diversification within the genre, with subgenres mixing Future Funk with elements of synthwave, chillwave and even hip-hop. Artists continued to experiment with new production techniques while expanding the boundaries of the genre. Although a cataloging of the various subgenres may seem forced, it can nevertheless be useful for purely informative purposes, they can be reported as follows:

- *“Original” Future Funk*: characterized by a sound that blends the classic funk of the 70s and 80s with contemporary electronic rhythms. Productions of this type are often based on funk and disco vinyl samples, integrated with current synthesizers and drum machines. It is often characterized by brevity of the songs, repetitive loops and danceable rhythms.
- *Vapor Funk*: a subgenre that incorporates typical vaporwave elements, especially distortions accentuated by bpm changes. This type of production often uses samples of lounge music, smooth jazz and muzak, manipulated to create a hypnotic sound. It stands out for its dreamlike atmospheres and retro-futuristic style.
- *Disco Funk*: inspired by the disco sounds of the 70s (and early 80s). Disco Funk productions incorporate funky basslines with rich arrangements of strings and electric pianos, thus creating a sophisticated atmosphere. This subgenre is characterized by bright melodies, choruses and dancefloor grooves.
- *City Pop Funk*: based on the revisitation of City Pop songs. Characterized by catchy melodies, funky/soul rhythms with a purely Japanese flavor mixed with Western influences, City Pop Funk incorporates samples from artists such as Tatsuro Yamashita, Mariya Takeuchi and Taeko Ohnuki. It is extremely recognizable and often creates a vibrant and exotic mood.
- *Space Funk*: Explore more experimental sonic territories. Productions often use sci-fi sounding synthesizers, psychedelic effects and samples taken from sci-fi movies soundtracks to create a futuristic and enveloping sound. This subgenre is characterized by ethereal atmospheres and a mood of travel through space and time.

Connecting Past and Future: The Role of the Internet

There is no doubt that the Internet has played an essential role in shaping and spreading Future Funk as a musical and cultural phenomenon.

The web has provided producers and enthusiasts with a broad platform to connect and share music. Forums, discussion groups and social media have created virtual spaces where artists can promote their works, receive feedback and collaborate with other musicians. This online support network has helped create a cohesive community of enthusiasts, fueling the growth and evolution of the genre. Future Funk, like vaporwave, is a purely *overground* genre, meaning it is potentially available to anyone with an internet connection; this is an essential condition. This allows you to randomly come across a Future Funk song and be able to get closer to the relative community in a few seconds, obtaining the information necessary to understand the phenomenon and accessing all the available productions, at every level.

Using the internet also allows you to easily find the musical and technological resources necessary to create your own tracks. Online tutorials and guides are easily available and prove very useful to those who wish to learn music production techniques. This democratic access to resources allows almost anyone who wants to participate and contribute to the genre, thus fueling its diversity and vitality.

In addition to the music itself, the network helped shape the visual appearance and aesthetic of Future Funk. Artists use various social media platforms to share artwork, graphics and clips that accompany their music. The role of YouTube should be underlined as it hosted, and still hosts, a large number of videos and mixtapes that have contributed to defining the visual aesthetics of the genre, characterized by retro images and obsessively repeated clips of Japanese anime.

This visual aesthetic, often characterized by pop culture references, plays an important role in the genre's visual identity and overall listener experience.

Finally, it is only thanks to the web that we have been able to witness an international diffusion of Future Funk over the years. The network allows artists to reach global audiences efficiently. Streaming platforms like SoundCloud and Bandcamp have provided a showcase for artists, allowing fans around the world to discover and appreciate the genre. Additionally, online events and festivals have helped create a sense of community among fans around the world. It is important to underline again that this is a genre not intended for radio or physical media. Future Funk is born and dies, so to speak, on the web.

An Exploration of the Relationship Between Vaporwave and Future Funk: Dialogue between Nostalgia and Innovation

The relationship between Vaporwave and Future Funk represents an interesting intersection between two musical genres that share a profound aesthetic and conceptual affinity. While both draw on the sounds of the past to create something new, they differ in their distinct approaches to nostalgia, innovation and cultural reinterpretation.

Vaporwave and Future Funk both have their roots in the early 2000s although they derive from slightly different musical and cultural influences. Vaporwave, through the slowing down of songs and an extensive use of lounge music samples, smooth jazz and muzak, reflects an aesthetic of distorted nostalgia and a criticism of consumerism and mass culture. On the other hand, Future Funk is primarily based on funk and disco from the 70s and 80s, incorporating modern electronic beats to create a more energetic and danceable sound. Both genres reappropriate cultural debris and are deeply influenced by nostalgia but in different ways. Vaporwave takes a more critical and dystopian perspective, exploring the sense of alienation and disillusionment in the digital age. In contrast, Future Funk embraces nostalgia more head-on, using the past as a source of pure inspiration, to create a sound that celebrates the purposeful dynamics typical of funk culture.

It should be added that, despite their nostalgic roots, the two genres incorporate contemporary and innovative elements in their productions, while Vaporwave explores the frontiers of sonic ambiguity and digital manipulation, Future Funk focuses on a mix between more traditional rhythms and manipulation of sounds through the use of contemporary electronic instrumentation. This combination of old and new offers vast possibilities and becomes fertile ground for innovation and experimentation.

Aesthetic and philosophical reflections

Future Funk represents an interesting fusion of temporal and cultural concepts. Its philosophical scope is vast and complex, offering us a lens through which to explore the relationship between history, innovation and cultural memory. It is more than just a musical genre, it is a significant expression of our complex relationship with the past, present and future. Beyond its refined sonic aesthetics, it allows us to raise crucial philosophical questions.

It can be considered a sort of multipurpose simulacrum, a deliberately "wrong" copy of an infinite number of miniaturized debris which, mixing, insinuate themselves into our ear giving rise to a peculiar experience: something already heard but substantially different.

Future Funk therefore moves at 128 bpm between Plato and Lucretius.

Nostalgia is a central theme. Artists of the genre draw on collective memory to bring sounds and styles of the past back to life, transforming them into something new and fascinating. Philosophically speaking, nostalgia can be considered a creative force, as it pushes us to reconsider and reinterpret the past through a contemporary gaze. In the context of Future Funk, nostalgia becomes, among other things, a tool for exploring and reconsidering the musical heritage of past generations, enabling a form of intergenerational dialogue through music.

Through the incorporation of contemporary and experimental elements, a constant desire for evolution and progress is suggested. The delicate balance between past and present raises fundamental questions about the nature of innovation and cultural progress. How much can we innovate without losing sight of our cultural roots? How can we integrate the new with the old in a meaningful and authentic way? These are questions that Future Funk invites us to consider, offering a very interesting perspective on the interaction between tradition and modernity in contemporary culture.

Another relevant philosophical aspect is the practice of "cultural remission", the reuse and creative reinterpretation of cultural elements of the past. This practice raises complex ethical questions about appropriation and intellectual property. Who has the right to use and manipulate pre-existing works? To what extent should we respect the integrity of original works as we transform them to fit our contemporary context? Future Funk can push us to reflect on these questions, highlighting the ethical and moral tensions that underlie the creative process.

In conclusion, we are not just dealing with a form of entertainment but also a source of inspiration and philosophical reflection on the human condition and our constant desire to connect with the past and anticipate the future.

What If...

The playful component of Future Funk is undeniable, so why not move a little further and have fun thinking about what three of the greatest minds of the 20th century could have said about the topic.

Umberto Eco, in his essay "Apocalyptic and Integrated", explores the way in which the masses react to mass culture. Future Funk, with its use of sampling and references to 1980s pop culture, can be seen through Eco's lens as an "integration" phenomenon. Artists and fans of the genre embrace and reinterpret elements of past mass culture, rejecting an "apocalyptic" vision that sees mass culture as degrading. In this sense, popular culture is celebrated and reinvented in a contemporary context. It should be remembered that Umberto Eco demonstrated in his work a strong interest in

contemporary cultural phenomena and their influence on society and identity. Since Future Funk fuses elements of the past, present and, ideally, the future, it could be considered by Eco as an example of "hypermodern", a concept he theorized that describes contemporary culture as characterized by constant reinterpretation of the past through technological innovation. The illustrious semiologist could therefore appreciate Future Funk's ability to create a bridge between the past and the present, combining the roots of classic funk with the technology available today.

He might also see this genre as an expression of postmodern nostalgia, in which the creative reinterpretation of the past becomes a form of resistance to the hyper-technological present. It is possible to assume that it could raise critical questions about Future Funk in terms of authenticity and originality, considering its reliance on sampling and cultural remission and could explore the ethical dilemmas related to the issue of intellectual property in the digital age.

Witnessing Zygmunt Bauman's digressions so full of irony, especially during his last years of life, is considered by many to be an experience of rare quality. There is little doubt that the Polish intellectual would have had a blast dealing with the cultural representation enacted by Future Funk. With the concept of "liquid modernity" Bauman describes a society in constant change and movement, where traditions and identities are fluid. The genre reflects this liquid modernity, combining the old and the new, giving life to a musical hybrid not anchored to a specific era thus becoming a symbol of cultural fluidity and the ability to adapt in an ever-changing world.

From a Baumanian perspective, Future Funk could be interpreted as a reflection of consumer society and the culture of hypermodernity and could be seen as an example of "liquid modernity", characterized by the fluidity of identities and the constant reworking of the past in era of globalization.

Bauman might appreciate the genre's ability to create a sense of community and belonging through the sharing and reinterpretation of popular culture. He could deeply analyze the practice of sampling, interpreted as an example of resistance to the "waste society" in which goods, even cultural ones, are consumed and discarded rapidly without a true sense of lasting value, leaving debris and scrap everywhere. A form of cultural resistance in which artists reinterpret and reclaim the past in a way that challenges the dominant narratives of mass culture. He might see the genre as an expression of the search for authenticity and meaning in a world characterized by superficiality and fleetingness.

Gilles Deleuze, in his work "Difference and Repetition", talks about repetition as a means of creating difference. In Future Funk, the use of samples and the repetition of musical fragments from the past are not mere acts of nostalgia but creative operations that generate something new and different. Through repetition the original material is transformed, introducing variations and innovations that enrich the aesthetic experience.

According to this approach, the genre could therefore be considered not only as a revival of the past, but as a true process of continuous reinvention and differentiation. Consequently, the Parisian philosopher could place emphasis on the theme of cultural production and creativity and could therefore see Future Funk as an example of the "creation of concepts" he talks about in his work.

He might appreciate the genre's ability to mix and reinterpret elements of the past to create something new and innovative. Future Funk could be considered an act of "deterritorialization", in which musical conventions are shifted and redefined through the creative use of sampling and revisiting.

The genre would perhaps be interpreted as an example of "lines of flight" that challenge dominant hierarchies and structures in music production, an attempt to explore new sonic territories and free creativity from the restrictions of the past and present.

Deleuze could finally explore the ethical and political implications related to the concept of "reappropriation" by questioning the power dynamics implicit in the taking and use of samples from pre-existing works and at the same time see Future Funk as part of a broader cultural movement oriented to the "schizophrenization" of society, in which identities and narratives are fragmented and recombined in new and unpredictable forms.