# Vaporwave Pedagogy: Multimodal Learning with an Internet Music Microgenre

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*This article describes how a form of pedagogy modeled on vaporwave musical and visual compositions can offer a strong contrast to simplified visions of students' positions vis-à-vis socioeconomic change. Vaporwave is a microgenre of music that emerged on the Internet in the 2010s. It is characterized by an extensive use of slowed-down audio loops sampled from kitschy sources, such as easy-listening and mall music. The microgenre's aesthetics are inspired by the early days of the Internet, as exemplified in the musical piece* リサフランク 420 / 現代のコンピュ *(Lisa Frank 420 / Modern Computing) by Macintosh Plus. This article rethinks teaching methods that rely on anti-rhetorical tropes such as irony, detachment, or appeals to authenticity to discuss philosophical concepts related to public discourse and consumerism. It shows instead that vaporwave creations do not suppress the intimate affective relationships students have developed with brands and consumption practices. This article then develops a vaporwave-informed pedagogy which allows teachers and students to investigate these socioeconomic connections and myths through creation, and productively considers their capacity to reshape local media ecologies.*

**Keywords**: multimodal anthropology, music genres, internet communities, media infrastructures, philosophy of education

**Introduction**

When vaporwave emerged in 2012, the authors of this paper were involved in a protest movement. Days spent holding signs and chanting anti-neoliberal

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slogans were often followed by watching protest videos on YouTube. Through the cryptic algorithms of YouTube suggestions, one of the authors of this article (Guillaume Loignon), a college philosophy teacher, stumbled upon a disconcerting combination of music and images referred to as 'vaporwave'. Vaporwave provoked nostalgia for objects of consumerism and corporate culture – even for products he had never bought or consumed. The contrast with the protest movement's aesthetic was jarring. What is more, vaporwave was gaining in popularity amongst the students, suggesting opportunities to revisit teaching materials and practices: how did vaporwave 'work', and what could teachers learn from it?

This article argues that vaporwave – a microgenre made of the aggregation of musical and visual aesthetics from the 80s and 90s – can serve as a pedagogical source for teaching philosophical and anthropological concepts. Vaporwave is a musical and visual aesthetic that emerged on the Internet in early 2012. The term itself is a play on *vaporware*, i.e., products or features that are advertised by companies with the deliberate intention of creating a hype, but never reach the market. A key feature of vaporwave music is the collage of slowed-down audio samples borrowed from "'taboo' electronic sounds" or "elevator music": generally music from the 1980s and 1990s that has been rejected as exemplifying bad taste, such as smooth jazz, Muzak®, Japanese *city pop*, new age, etc.[1] Vaporwave music is often combined with images or video segments in a recognizable aesthetic that typically combines *nouveau riche* kitsch (Greek statuary being a common element) with imagery relating to the early days of the Internet, consumer culture, hedonism, 1980s and 1990s Japan, and the corporate culture of this period. These audiovisuals are presented without clear ironical or parodic purpose revealing, as we will show, that creating an affective relationship with the material is part of the experience, as emphasized by the various techniques used by vaporwave artists to point towards the technical aspects of the creation, diffusion and consumption of vaporwave art.

Using a multimodal analysis focused on media materiality, this article takes the glitchy videos and low-quality sounds remediated by vaporwave artists seriously. We show how vaporwave's constitutive audio and video techniques shed new light on old and new inquiries by helping students reframe concepts and abstract thoughts. The article explores how vaporwave artists navigate the contemporary "sonic infrastructures" they inhabit, developing "sonic skills" by mastering "[...] the entwinement of listening skill (and the ability to engage in different modes of listening) with concrete practical skills

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[1] Georgina Born and Christopher Haworth, "From Microsound to Vaporwave: Internet-Mediated Musics, Online Methods, and Genre," *Music & Letters* 98, no. 4 (November 2017): 601–47; Laura Glitsos, "Vaporwave, or Music Optimised for Abandoned Malls," *Popular Music* 37, no. 1 (January 2018): 100–118; Gearon Schembri and Jac Tichbon, "Digital Consumers as Cultural Curators: The Irony of Vaporwave," *Arts and the Market* 7, no. 2 (2017): 191–212.

in the making, recording, storing and retrieving of sound."[2] These artists also dabble with different video formats and algorithmically-produced colors, creating artistic forms, as well as research experiments, which delve into "[…] archival examination of the materiality of media object."[3] Through these processes, vaporwave artists uncover media ecologies, which slowly emerge as they carry out their explorations. Furthermore, by putting vaporwave audio-visuals in dialogue with the sounds and images used in our classrooms (such as 'anti-ads', Plato's Allegory of the cave and the movie *The Matrix*), we reflect on how students can be led to engage critically with brands and consumer practices. This article describes how the multilayered and non-linear compositions of vaporwave creations can inform a new pedagogy which offers a strong contrast to 'anti-rhetorical' discourses that reinforce simplified visions of students' positions vis-à-vis socioeconomic change.

This article comprises two main, interrelated parts. First, we examine vaporwave techniques across a set of examples recognized by the vaporwave online community as particularly representative of the microgenre's predominant characteristics.[4] This analysis offers a comprehensive review of the scholarly discussion on vaporwave's (very short) history, bringing out its nascent tendencies, principal actors, and material infrastructure. We then show how our observations reveal substantial disconnections with another other media movement – *Adbusters* – which, in the 1990s, aimed to disrupt the mainstream discourses on consumer habits within capitalist societies. Second, we highlight how teaching philosophical concepts by means of a typical classroom activity – comparing Plato's Allegory of the Cave with the movie *The Matrix* – can be productively challenged and improved by the vaporwave artists' novel insights. In particular, we point to vaporwave creations' seemingly generalized capacity to induce paradoxical affects by rebuilding our relationships with products and branding strategies, neither wholly refusing nor embracing a resistance posture wholesale.

The article concludes with a set of recommended teaching orientations which form the basis of a multimodal, vaporwave-informed pedagogy. Our approach acknowledges how concepts and ideas are discovered in the interplay between modes of communication and their infrastructural foundations. It proposes that research experimentation with sounds and images can shape philosophical and anthropological teaching going forward.

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[2] We are especially interested here in what Adam Kielman describes as "[...] the technical infrastructures that transmit mediated sounds, from copper wires to compact discs to social networking websites." See Adam Kielman, "Sonic infrastructures, musical circulation and listening practices in a changing People's Republic of China," *Sound Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 22; Joeri Bruyninckx and Alexandra Supper, "Sonic skills in cultural contexts: theories, practices and materialities of listening," *Sound Studies* 2, no. 1(2016): 2.

[3] Carolyn Kane, *Chromatic Algorithms Synthetic Color, Computer Art, and Aesthetics after Code.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 3.

[4] This article is based on the authors' reflections on their teaching practices as well as extended discussions with colleagues over the years.

**Multimodal vaporwave**

Multimodal anthropology considers that visual and audio information is transmitted across different modes, and that these types of information are intrinsic parts of ethnographic material and analysis (see also 'audiovisual anthropology').[5] The multimodal approach proposes that sound shapes image (and vice versa) within specific media ecologies.

In the analysis below, we build on McKerrell and Way, who understand music "[...] as a communicative element embedded within multimodal discourse alongside modes such as text, still images, moving images, colour, gesture and other sounds."[6] On this view, music is one mode among many; its signals and frequencies can move beyond its original recording, playback, and formats. Similarly, a video is recorded and played back across other modes of communication – it reverberates beyond its original boundaries, finding a niche in the media ecology. For instance, while an ethnographic film is shown in class, students may talk on their cellphones, look out the windows at street ads, scroll through GIFs on the Internet, sing along (silently) to a pop song recorded as an MP3, feel vibrations from a car's loud engine passing by, and jot down questions about the film. These interconnected forms of technological mediation overlap, shaping students' learning in and out of the classroom.[7]

The contribution of a multimodal approach lies in understanding each form of mediation of lived experience as a piece of a larger whole to be recomposed. The material and sensory aspects of these mediations are to be analyzed with respect to their specific (singular) and parallel (collective) relationships to a given affective situation. For example, if researchers attract students' attention to digital noise in a video sequence, these students may reflect on the paucity of light, its impact on night vision, and its effects on color perception and reproduction. Through this reflection, students can understand that the same infrastructural situation likely presents similar conditions of creation for, say, the cellphone selfies they take. They can recognize how digital noise and the fading-out of colors connect with social actors' everyday environment.[8] Students learn that a poorly-lit workspace, music show, or family gathering can morph into, and be represented by, the excessive noise found in digital videos and photos.

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[5] Lucien Taylor, "Visual Anthropology Is Dead, Long Live Visual Anthropology!," *American Anthropologist* 100, no. 2 (1998): 534-537.

[6] Simon McKerrell and Lyndon C.C. Way, "Understanding Music as Multimodal Discourse." in *Music as Multimodal Discourse. Semiotics, Power and Protest* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017): 2.

[7] We agree with Ihde and Malafouris' premise that "[m]ateriality and the forms of technical mediation that humans make and use are not passive or neutral but actively shape what we are in a given historical moment." Don Ihde and Lambros Malafouris, "Homo faber Revisited: Postphenomenology and Material Engagement Theory." Philosophy & Technology 32, no. 2(2019): 209.

[8] Carolyn Kane, *Chromatic Algorithms Synthetic Color, Computer Art, and Aesthetics after Code.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Our argument follows this pedagogical perspective, proposing that aesthetics are not only created through dominant material infrastructures in a given context, but also refer to them. These material infrastructures shape aesthetic patterns; they become standardized and expected modalities of interaction.[9] Indeed, as Gershon & Bell rightly remind us: "[…] infrastructural decisions by companies and governments also strongly affect how people can navigate the media ecologies surrounding them."[10] Our aim is to explain how vaporwave artists have successfully emphasized such connections, how their techniques have shaped the very existence of vaporwave as a new music microgenre, and how this ongoing process could inform teaching practices.

Vaporwave artists creatively tinker with audio frequencies and visual representations to produce intimate connections with listeners' materially imagined pasts. These young artists have notoriously remixed audio tracks from 90s shopping malls, which evoke elusive memories of utopian capitalist systems, emerging and yet fading away in the slowed-down tempos beloved by fans. This process has highlighted the radical indeterminacy of vaporwave's historical inspirations, which has been both revealed and diluted by the microgenre's hypnotic audio loops, glitchy VHS signature, and Windows 95 color palette.

We focus on vaporwave's technical characteristics with a view to addressing students' understanding of abstract ideas and arguments. As we discuss vaporwave's transparent – and deliberate – aesthetic and technical peculiarities, we sketch a pedagogical approach that takes students' aesthetic intuitions seriously. Our argument is itself woven into the multilayered and open-ended characteristics of vaporwave – a creative form to 'think with' in the classroom. Because vaporwave is a microgenre defined by – and made of – constant re-arrangements of other media, we propose to invite students "[...] to reflect on [the] media ecologies in which they are already imbricated, and [to challenge] them to engage these forms and practices in innovative ways."[11] In particular, we focus on the ways in which vaporwave tracks are inscribed in the sensory and material environments of their creator's imagined inspirations.

**Vaporwave music and materiality**

Loops of degraded, kitschy audio are a recurrent trait of vaporwave music, paralleling and complementing the animated GIF loops and video collages of

9  Brian Larkin, "Degraded Images, Distorted Sounds: Nigerian Video and the Infrastructure of Piracy," *Public Culture* 16, no. 2(2004): 289-314.

10 Ilana Gershon and Joshua A. Bell, "Introduction: The Newness of New Media," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 54, no. 3(2013): 260.

11 Samuel Gerald Collins, Matthew Durington, and Harlant Gill. "Multimodality: An Invitation." *American Anthropologist* 119, no. 1(2017): 144.

vaporwave visual art.[12] As noted by Glitsos: "The Vaporwave song structure is usually short and repetitive, often slow (sitting around 60–90 bpm) with vocal samples positioned low in the mix saturated with heavy reverb and often slowed down to produce a 'stretched out' effect or a 'melting' quality."[13] Vaporwave distinguishes itself from other electronic and sample-based music genres by using different processes to point towards its own materiality, such as degrading the quality of the audio or by mindfully selecting audio textures that are artificial and surreal. Vaporwave is indeed embedded in a dynamic process by which the "[…] material dimension creates and gives form to the discursive, and vice versa."[14]

Adam Trainer shows how vaporwave's deliberate audio degradation allows the artist to summon the past, both in the content of the loop and in the way the audio sample is modified and presented.[15] *Lisa Frank 420 – Modern computing* by Macintosh Plus is the iconic example of such a process. Built around a sample borrowed from Diana Ross' 1984 hit song *It's your move*, this track uses various techniques to highlight its own materiality. The main sample is 'downpitched', an effect which evokes an analog recording playing at a lower speed, but which also makes the limitations of the digital format more apparent. In the digital domain, downpitching causes audio degradation, as it lowers the sampling rate,[16] which is associated with the audio quality. This effect, which has been interpreted as a form of distortion, is a common technical trope in vaporwave music.[17] Slowing down the audio sample also affects its general tonal qualities. Figure 1 below compares the audio signature (spectrum) of the track's main sample – with and without a 25% decrease in pitch – and demonstrates the resulting change in the audio spectrum.

In *Lisa Frank 420 – Modern computing*, the choice of splicing points for the loops makes the 'chopped' nature of the loops more apparent. Some of the words in the original melody are now heard in a different order, with syllables abruptly cut. At the end of the track, the artist 'reloops' shorter bits of Diana Ross' song in a seemingly random manner, evoking a scratched CD (an effect likely achieved using the Beat Repeater plug-in built in Ableton Live audio editing software).

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[12] Raphaël Nowak and Andrew Whelan, "'Vaporwave Is (Not) a Critique of Capitalism': Genre Work in an Online Music Scene," *Open Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 451–462.

[13] Glitsos, "Vaporwave, or Music Optimised for Abandoned Malls," 100.

[14] Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies.* (Open Humanities Press: Ann Arbor, 2012): 91.

[15] Adam Trainer, "From Hypnagogia to Distroid: Postironic Musical Renderings of Personal Memory," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, ed. Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran, Ebook Central (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 419–27.

[16] The sampling rate is the frequency at which the analog-to-digital converter captures the signal and converts it to binary data.

[17] Schembri and Tichbon, "Digital Consumers as Cultural Curators."
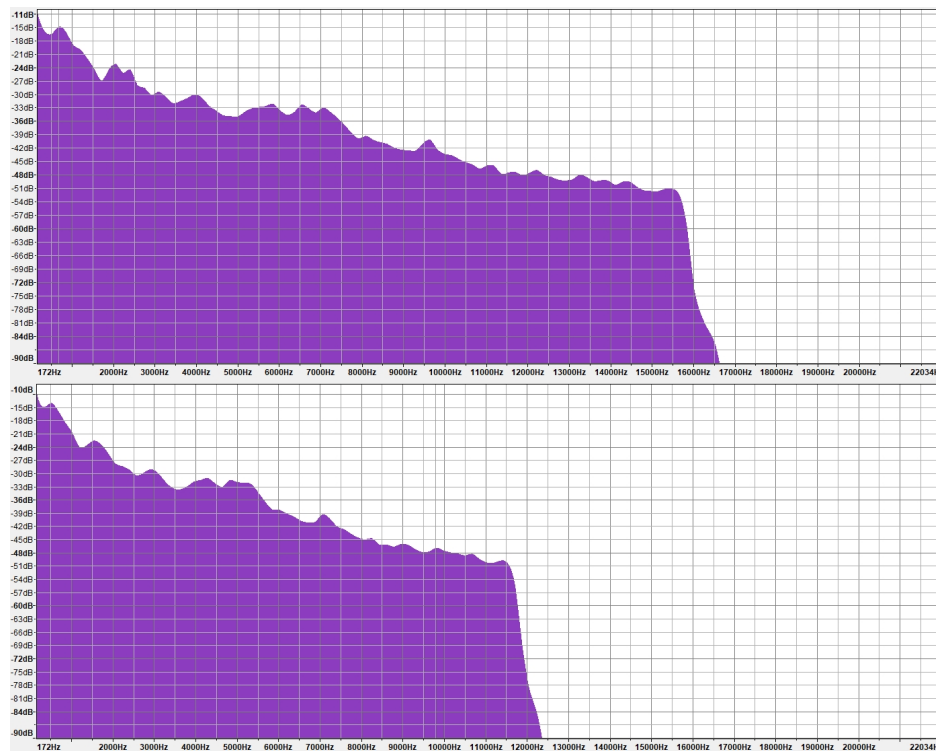
Fig. 1: Spectrum analysis of the *It's your move* sample in its original form (top) and slowed-down by 25% (bottom). The audio information above 13000Hz almost disappears.

Pointing towards materiality in music production can also be achieved with techniques that transform 'clean' tracks to make them sound highly artificial. Obvious examples of this technique are James Ferraro's *Far Side Virtual.*[18] This vaporwave album is not built on degraded and kitschy loops, but instead prioritizes artificial-sounding MIDI instruments. It is mixed to accentuate the high end of the audio spectrum, evoking the harshness of early digital recordings.

Although quality degradation involves a loss of information in the signal, the deliberate degrading in vaporwave sometimes seems to add information. Indeed, the technique reveals hidden characteristics that are sonically pleasing and contribute to defining the genre. The audio treatment of the samples in vaporwave gives the tracks a general feeling that has been described as "warm" or "[pulsating] with an enigmatic intensity."[19] For instance, the track

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[18] A more detailed analysis of this album can be found in Trainer, "From Hypnagogia to Distroid: Postironic Musical Renderings of Personal Memory," 415-416.

[19] Nowak and Whelan, "'Vaporwave Is (Not) a Critique of Capitalism': Genre Work in An Online Music Scene"; Padraic Killeen, "Burned Out Myths and Vapour Trails: Vaporwave's Affective Potentials," *Open Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 2018): 626–38.

*B:/Start Up* by *Blank Banshee* samples the startup sounds of Macintosh OS and Windows 95 computers (the latter created by composer Brian Eno) and plays with the pitch to emphasize the audio textures while creating an actual melody. Such audio doctoring and collaging can sometimes generate artefacts that appear as emergent properties. For instance, in *Lisa Frank 420 – Modern computing,* the words "It's all in your hands" sung by Diana Ross, once playfully mutated by Macintosh Plus, come to be heard as "It's all in your head." Similarly, in *Eccojams A3*, Daniel Lopatin (as Chuck Person) brings new meaning to a song by recycling the American teen pop hit *Too Little, Too Late* by JoJo. Lopatin's audio treatment makes the background vocals of the sampled material blend with the synthesizers, creating a new dreamy sonic texture reminiscent of his earlier synthesiser-based work released as Oneohtrix Point Never. The resulting track triggers a bittersweet, nostalgic mood which is intensified by a looped vocal sample (mis)heard as "Be real, it doesn't matter anyway, you know it's just a little too late" repeated into meaninglessness – perhaps highlighting the repetitive nature of earworms, or prolonging the "eternal pop moment."[20]

**Images of vaporwave**

Vaporwave graphic images, video collages, photographs, and animated GIFs function as a collection of visual tropes that have emerged online as a new artistic style. Text is sometimes present in the form of single words or short sentences, predominantly in English or Japanese, often with surreal content pastiching the existential musings of motivational posters and self-help literature. The presentation of these tropes through filters, like pastel tints, VCR effects or digital glitches, exposes the materiality of production techniques in a manner similar to vaporwave's audio treatment.

　　Vaporwave art will usually employ several of these technical tropes in the form of a collage, whether in a standalone form or accompanied by music that enhances the visuals (and vice-versa). The presentation of visual elements often suggests expanding and shrinking space – a treatment that creates a visual scene affecting how the music is perceived. This process of world-building is itself a vaporwave visual trope. For example, the cover of the album *Floral Shoppe* has turned into an iconic vaporwave image by visually imagining its own possible world: the image shows a bust of the Greek god Helios on a checkered pattern floor leading to a picture of the New York skyline with the Twin Towers still present.[21] The music of *Floral Shoppe* seems to emanate from this alternate reality, an impression reinforced by the audio treatment (mostly downpitching and reverb) which is consistent from track to track. The process of associating music with a visual theme can be found in other niche genres

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[20] Trainer, "From Hypnagogia to Distroid: Postironic Musical Renderings of Personal Memory," 414.

[21] An archived version can be accessed at the following URL:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:MacintoshPlus_FloralShoppe_Cover.png

such as progressive rock and afro-futurism.[22] In vaporwave, however, this process is used systematically to argue for the categorization of a track *as* vaporwave.



A e s t h e t i c  M e m e s | 1½ Hour Vaporwave Mix
Eviqz • 1.8M views • 4 years ago

Edgy vapourwave Mix, just you you. Edit; Thank you all very much for 1.3 Million views ❤
Soundcloud: ...

Fig. 2: Screen captures from the YouTube website shows a compilation of vaporwave music accompanied by genre-appropriate visuals.

Vaporwave art has developed through collaborative processes enabled by the Internet platforms accessed by vaporwave's newly formed community. To analyze these overlapping collaborations across platforms, we follow Dicks et al. in considering that "meaning is produced through the inter-relationships between and among different media and modes."[23] Collective and public judgment about *vaporwave-ness* is indeed part of the vaporwave experience, as is the specific categorization into subgenres – a frequent topic on the Reddit vaporwave community.[24] Users who believe that a proposed piece is vaporwave can

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[22] Ken McLeod, "Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism and Meaning in Popular Music," *Popular Music* 22, no. 3 (October 2003): 337–55.

[23] Bella Dicks, Bambo Soyinka, and Amanda Coffey, "Multimodal ethnography," *Qualitative Research* 6, no. 1 (2006): 78.

[24] Reddit users inquiring about subgenres of vaporwave will often be redirected to a chart available at: http://i.imgur.com/K78sYq3.jpg. Readers should also consider this

express this aesthetic judgement through the platform's voting system, but they also often use the single-word comment, "aesthetics" or "aesthetic," written at times with Unicode characters: "ａ ｅ ｓ ｔ ｈ ｅ ｔ ｉ ｃ."[25] This collaborative process indicates that aesthetic judgment is ingrained in vaporwave subculture in a bottom-up, folksonomic process that expands and sustains the experience.[26] This also demonstrates that the vaporwave community is very much aware of both the digital historicity of the Internet (shown by the 'early Internet' visual trope of the Unicode script) and the contemporary possibilities of the Internet as a medium of communication and artistic expression.[27]

In other words, the combination of vaporwave music with vaporwave visuals, as shown in Figure 2, may allow the content creator to nudge collective judgment towards a classification of the music as vaporwave. This folksonomic process is made possible by Internet platforms such as Tumblr, reddit and YouTube.

**What is vaporwave about?**

Vaporwave has been commonly interpreted as a critique of capitalism.[28] This interpretation first appeared in a 2012 article by Adam Harper, in the online magazine *Dummy*. The association of vaporwave with 'capitalism' might seem obvious, considering its selection of images and sounds referencing various forms of market capitalism. But Harper appears to have made generalizations based only on the early vaporwave music efforts that did adhere to this narrative.[29] Nowak and Whelan propose instead that this narrative worked as an origin story which helped consolidate vaporwave in its beginnings and contin-

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reddit discussion about the co-construction of the genre, available on the Vaporwave subcommunity:
https://www.reddit.com/r/Vaporwave/comments/3lki6c/when_does_it_stop_being_vaporwave_to_you/

[25] Described in Killeen, "Burned Out Myths and Vapour Trails: Vaporwave's Affective Potentials," 626. Unicode is a normalized system for encoding characters. The second representation of the word "aesthetic" shown here borrows its Roman letters from a script initially meant for East Asian countries like Japan, resulting in the apparent spaces between the letters.

[26] Born and Haworth, "From Microsound to Vaporwave: Internet-Mediated Musics, Online Methods, and Genre."

[27] Born, Georgina, and Christopher Haworth. "Mixing It: Digital Ethnography and Online Research Methods—A Tale of Two Global Digital Music Genres." In *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*, pp. 96-112. Routledge, 2017.

[28] Nowak and Whelan, "'Vaporwave Is (Not) a Critique of Capitalism': Genre Work in An Online Music Scene."

[29] Born and Haworth, "From Microsound to Vaporwave: Internet-Mediated Musics, Online Methods, and Genre"; Killeen, "Burned Out Myths and Vapour Trails: Vaporwave's Affective Potentials."

ues to influence the genre, even after it was later rejected by the artists themselves.[30] In other words, it is possible that Harper's interpretation worked as a self-fulfilling prophecy, motivating artists to use images and sounds associated with capitalism. Following Harper, vaporwave has also been described by Glitsos as the "hollow" expression of repressed trauma, and by Koc as the melancholic expression of the "bleak affective space of late-capitalism."[31] But vaporwave's positive, muted, warm, soft, sometimes even cheerful and utopian visions appear instead to point to specific social phenomena – notably mass consumption – which have been associated with capitalism, or in some cases, market socialism.

As a genre, vaporwave has maintained an ongoing relationship with consumer practices. Music genres that recruit sounds from the past to take a political stance, such as electroclash, will often employ ostentatious irony to create distance "as a means of disavowing any ideological link with the appropriated material."[32] Below, we show how this process has also been used by the Adbusters 'culture jamming' movement. But vaporwave turns this around: the feelings of nostalgia aim to *create* a connection with the appropriated material: in this case, images and sounds associated with consumer and corporate cultures. Insofar as listeners are affectively connected with the appropriated material, they become mindful of their stance *inside* consumerist societies. In so doing, vaporwave art demonstrates how it can itself be the very object of its criticism. Indeed, as Nowak and Whelan suggest, "[…] what [vaporwave] says could not be said without the commercial music it repurposes or the networked platform cultures that gave rise to and sustain it (Bandcamp, 4chan, YouTube etc.)"[33] The dependency on Internet platforms is here not hidden, but revealed, just as the materiality of the music becomes apparent.

Vaporwave artists thus offer a novel solution to the paradox of criticizing consumerism and corporate culture while being part of them, they constantly and playfully negotiate their position within this system, and their work has become a critique of previous efforts that prioritized irony and detachment.

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[30] Nowak and Whelan, "'Vaporwave Is (Not) a Critique of Capitalism': Genre Work in An Online Music Scene."

[31] Glitsos, "Vaporwave, or Music Optimised for Abandoned Malls," 107; Alican Koc, "Do You Want Vaporwave, or Do You Want the Truth?: Cognitive Mapping of Late Capitalist Affect in the Virtual Lifeworld of Vaporwave," *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (2017): 60.

[32] Luvaas, Brent. 2006. "Re-Producing Pop: The Aesthetics of Ambivalence in a Contemporary Dance Music." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9(2): 167–187. Quoted in Trainer, "From Hypnagogia to Distroid: Postironic Musical Renderings of Personal Memory," 417. For irony in electroclash, see also David Madden, "Cross-dressing to Backbeats: the Status of the Electroclash Producer and the Politics of Electronic Music". *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* 4, no. 2 (2012): 27-47.

[33] Nowak and Whelan, 'Vaporwave Is (Not) a Critique of Capitalism': Genre Work in An Online Music Scene," 2.

**Learning with/from vaporwave**

Vaporwave's critical perspective gives us an opportunity to revisit teaching and learning processes, and to inform current pedagogical practices. Specifically, we build on Reichenbach's analysis of educational discourse, which suggests that the general failure or refusal to address a central paradox – how to impart autonomy – can lead to a "kitschy agreement or conformity" lacking nuance and complexity.[34] This state of "aesthetic infantilism" is characterized by the heavy use of simplistic slogans, rigid definitions, binary thinking, and the denial of conceptual contradictions.[35]

We see vaporwave as moving in a different direction. Vaporwave artists seek to cultivate ambiguity, rather than to push for specific messages. Vaporwave's aesthetics suggest that even the kitschiest sounds and images of the 1980s and 1990s, which could be dismissed because of their association with 'capitalism', can be doctored to produce new and interesting sounds, or to reveal hidden melodic potential. By re-appropriating those taboo symbols without irony (and its associated barriers), vaporwave artists performatively recognize their position inside global capitalism. They are also confident that the members of the vaporwave community – in which the roles of consumer, evaluator, and creator are often intertwined – will judge them fairly.[36] In a more modest sense, the vaporwave community enacts, on a small scale, the utopia of Internet-enabled participatory democracy (itself a very vaporwave idea) and extends their aesthetic experience through the communal performance of aesthetic judgements, allowing the spectators to "perform their political and cultural literacy."[37]

The miniature, three-dimensional realms created through vaporwave can be interpreted as open-ended "what if" scenarios that help us think about abstract concepts (e.g., capitalism, consumerism) in the context of possible pasts and futures; they create open discursive spaces, "castles in the sky" to quote another vocal sample from Chuck Person's *Eccojam A3* – and we are invited to "step inside".[38] This artistic use of metaphor aligns with Reichenbach's view that educational discourse should use metaphors not as kitsch persuasive

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[34] Roland Reichenbach and Bruce Maxwell, "The Power and Ambivalence of Pedagogical Kitsch," September 7, 2005,
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/ 143091.htm; Roland Reichenbach, "The Quest of Educational Slogans," in *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, ed. Michael A. Peters (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2016): 1–6.

[35] Roland Reichenbach and Bruce Maxwell, "The Power and Ambivalence of Pedagogical Kitsch."

[36] The Internet has expanded the "prosumer" status, helping one to embrace these different activities. See George Ritzer, Paul Dean, and Nathan Jurgenson, "The Coming Age of the Prosumer," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(2012): 379–98.

[37] Nowak and Whelan, "'Vaporwave Is (Not) a Critique of Capitalism': Genre Work in An Online Music Scene," 458.

[38] The idea that vaporwave invites us to step inside is borrowed from Alican Koc, "Do You Want Vaporwave, or Do You Want the Truth?," 60.

tools, but as epistemological devices to help us think about complex ideas.[39] Our view is that the vaporwave online community demonstrates the kind of aesthetic maturity that Reichenbach envisages for educational discourse. Vaporwave art can open up class discussions regarding a set of epistemological virtues that we summarize as follows: to be open-minded, to question the questions, to consider the standpoint from which you are reflecting, to consider the judgments and insights of others, to be skeptical of labels which seem too clear or solutions which seem too perfect.

Vaporwave's multimodal grounding leads us to wonder: "what new opportunities for resistance does multimodal invention offer" for both our research and pedagogical strategies in the classroom?[40] Vaporwave might afford students opportunities, not by sweeping aside mass-marketed products and brands, but by temporarily bracketing their affective resonance through oversaturation across modalities and their interplays, from down-pitched samples to broken VHS tape effects. Moreover, we expect students to easily see how multimodality operates at the junction of the digital infrastructures and platforms that they experience daily – and often master already. One such infrastructure, which retains a glow of technological 'newness' (judging by current 'edugaming' platforms) is the 3D rendering of virtual spaces, clearly exposed through its pixelated beginnings in the music video for the track *Lisa Frank 420.*[41] For our students, virtual design – the creation of possible worlds through a digitally-coded infrastructure – and its corollaries – immersive virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) – are *current* ways to imagine social interactions, rather than faraway futures. With its 'kitsch' 3D animations of virtual spaces, objects, and actions which rarely obey laws of physics, vaporwave creations can serve as a timely – if indirect – call for dialogue among students of fine arts, architecture, and engineering, but also philosophy and anthropology.

Below, we show how vaporwave can contribute, in humanities courses, to a reflection on reality, public discourse, and consumerism by drawing upon Loignon's experience as a philosophy teacher. In the context of an introductory philosophy class, Loignon has often discussed meta-discursive strategies that aim to convince by criticizing rhetoric, namely anti-rhetoric. The inclusion in the curriculum of Plato's Allegory of the cave, especially when combined with the movie *The Matrix*, evokes the common theme of having to 'wake up' from the illusions imposed on us by public discourse. This theme was also central in the 1990s 'anti-ads' popularized by the *Adbusters* movement, another form of anti-rhetoric which we discuss below in relation to vaporwave.

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[39] Roland Reichenbach, "The Quest of Educational Slogans."

[40] Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaac Marrero-Guillamo, "Introduction: Multimodal Anthropology and the Politics of Invention," *American Anthropologist* 121, no. 1 (2019): 226.

[41] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4gl-FX2RvI See also Peters on how technology "is a concept biased towards newness" and compare to infrastructure. John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015): 36.

**Anti-rhetoric, *The Matrix,* and vaporwave**

In the 1990s, the *Adbusters* movement aimed to turn capitalism on its head by ironically appropriating its principal imagery. To do so, the proponents of *Adbusters* pioneered *culture jamming*: using "irony or cut-up techniques to attack advertising and brand messages as the public manifestations of an invasive and unequal economic system", thus associating brands and icons of American consumerism with negative meaning.[42] One way to 'jam' culture was to create and disseminate 'anti-ads': poster-like collages mocking consumerism and corporations, as shown in Figure 3 below.[43] *Adbusters*-style anti-ads often used high contrast black-and-white images with bright red elements, creating a signature aesthetic that nodded to punk culture and went hand-in-hand with what we could describe as the dominant aesthetic of anti-globalization protests in the 1990s.



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[42] Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and value in media culture* (New-York: Routledge): 14; Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam* (New York: William Morrow, 1999).

[43] For a critical perspective on 'culture jamming' as a form of rhetoric, see Nick W. Robinson and Gina Castle Bell, "Effectiveness of Culture Jamming in Agenda Building: An Analysis of the Yes Men's Bhopal Disaster Prank," *Southern Communication Journal* 78, no. 4 (September 1, 2013): 352–68.

Fig. 3: two examples of Adbuster anti-ads, reproduced from Kalle Lasn's 1999 book. Notice the eyes covered with a slogan and the software operating system message box, visual elements now found in vaporwave art.

The founder of the *Adbusters* movement, Kalle Lasn, declared that the fight against large commercial conglomerates was "the only battle still worth fighting," and that other battles, such as feminism and anti-racism, would "fade into the background" once we freed ourselves from corporations.[44] Lasn's 1999 book, *Culture Jam*, offered readers a choice between living a life of authenticity and letting themselves be manipulated by corporate-controlled media into superficiality and mindless consumption. This dichotomy, emphasized through obvious irony and detachment in *Adbusters'* anti-ads, nonetheless appears to have been rejected by vaporwave artists. As we saw earlier, vaporwave can be read as a reflection on consumption from *inside* consumer society.[45] Even though vaporwave borrows much from the 1990s, it's cultural recapitulation seems to deliberately avoid references to the period's counter-cultural movements, as if vaporwave had emerged from a dimension where *Adbusters*, *Culture Jam*, 'alternative rock', anti-globalization protests, *No Logo*, etc., had never existed.

Before *Culture Jam*, major brands were already marketing products by appealing to the need for authenticity, which provided a pretext for the consumer to buy mass-marketed products.[46] The famous 1984 Apple Macintosh Super Bowl commercial (directed by Ridley Scott) recreated some of the elements of Plato's Allegory: in a bleak dystopian setup, a mindless mass of prisoners is forced into a dark room to stare at a Big Brother figure droning on a huge screen. An athlete then appears and throws a hammer at the screen, producing a bright flash of light that seems both to traumatize and awaken the prisoners. The message is clear: one should not be like the mindless masses; one can circumvent such a fate by buying an Apple-brand computer. A few years later, Sega broadcasted a very similar ad, promoting a new gaming console, the Genesis, with the prisoners replaced with bored teenagers playing the rival company's console. Marketing for the Genesis also relied on a vaguely defined technology called *blast processing*. Blast processing was in fact an example of vaporware: this technical possibility was never actually used in actual Sega products; it only served as a marketing gimmick, although it did inspire a few vaporwave tracks like 【Ｂｌａｓｔ　ｐｒｏｃｅｓｓｉｎｇ】 by Dream[Esc].

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[44] Lasn, *Culture Jam*, xvi.

[45] Nowak and Whelan, "'Vaporwave Is (Not) a Critique of Capitalism': Genre Work in An Online Music Scene," 457. *Adbusters* have also recently addressed vaporwave by creating a thematic feature on their website that presents a reading similar to Harper's *Dummy* magazine article. See http://featured.adbusters.org/vol04/

[46] Carly O'Neill, Dick Houtman, and Stef Aupers, "Advertising Real Beer: Authenticity Claims beyond Truth and Falsity," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 17, no. 5 (October 1, 2014): 585–601.

At the turn of the 1990s, several advertisement campaigns used the rhetoric of anti-rhetoric, such as the "Obey your thirst" campaign, which marketed Sprite soft drink to teenagers using a series of ads that mocked advertising tropes such as the use of mascots or celebrity endorsements. Just like *Adbusters*, the ads for Apple, Sega, and Sprite appealed to the desire for authenticity and rebellion while demonstrating cognizance of the rhetorical strategies used in advertisement.

In Loignon's introductory philosophy courses, similar rhetorical strategies are frequently unpacked to engage with ideas about consumption, economic conditions, and citizenship. The mandated curriculum for the introduction-to-philosophy courses typically calls for the teaching of critical thinking skills, in the service of education's main goals of promoting informed democratic participation.[47] A commonly taught text in introductory philosophy courses is the Allegory of the Cave, which appears in the book VII of Plato's *Republic*. Succinctly put, the Allegory describes a cave in which people have been living since childhood; shackled at the neck, they are forced to look at shadows that they mistake for reality. Once freed from their chains, one prisoner then makes a slow and painful ascension towards the daylight and discovers reality outside of the cave, yet he ultimately fails to convince the remaining prisoners to escape.



Fig. 4: two screen captures of an early Sega Genesis commercial.

In the classroom, a typical activity around Plato's Allegory consists in asking the students to draw the cave based on the text and then to discuss their interpretations of the Allegory.[48.] Students are meant to realize that their main sources of information – sensory input and public discourse – are unreliable and insufficient to reach the truth.

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[47] Peter Facione, "Critical thinking: A statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction (The Delphi Report)" (1990); R.T. Pithers and Rebecca Soden, "Critical Thinking in Education: A Review," *Educational Research* 42, no. 3 (January 2000): 237–49.

[48] Anne-Marie Bowery, "Drawing Shadows on the Wall: Teaching Plato's Allegory of the Cave," *Teaching Philosophy*, May 1, 2001.

The Allegory can be interpreted as a critique of naive realism, whereby the reality depicted by our senses corresponds to the inside of the cave. Another interpretation is that Plato criticizes the use of rhetoric in general – whereby the Allegory functions as an early kind of anti-ad which turns rhetoric against itself and encourages the critique of public discourse through irony. The text can also be read as an illustration of Plato's positions on education: in line with constructionist principles in education, the teacher cannot transmit ideas, but only help the pupils travel laboriously towards the truth. A possible subtext here is that the Allegory functions as a representation of the philosophy course itself by expressing a position (associated with Plato's middle period) according to which true virtue and happiness are only attainable by philosophers. Non-philosophers, by contrast, base their understanding of reality on sensory experience (i.e., the shadows in the cave); this mistaken strategy prevents them from appreciating the real and intrinsic value residing in non-sensory properties.[49]

To illustrate this theme, Loignon has used movies, especially *The Matrix*, a common choice of teaching material in the introductory philosophy classroom.[50] The dichotomy between true and false knowledge is an important theme in this 1999 science-fiction blockbuster. The movie's aesthetics build on classic dystopian science-fiction books of the *cyberpunk* subgenre, such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. But at its core, *The Matrix* can be read as a futuristic re-telling of Plato's Allegory.[51] The following comparison is adapted from a classroom activity used by Loignon in the context of the introductory philosophy course:

> The movie's protagonist is a computer programmer who works in a boring office and doubles as a hacker nicknamed Neo. While selling illegal software, Neo stumbles upon a series of messages and signs that lead him to doubt the nature of reality. At this point, Neo understands very little about the nature of The Matrix. A benevolent character called Morpheus then offers Neo the choice to escape from the Matrix or remain inside it (the movie's equivalent for Plato's Cave). This dilemma is symbolized by choosing between a red and a blue pill. Neo chooses the red pill. In a scene that conjures up the nightmarish airbrush art of H.R. Giger, Neo then breaks free from an artificial womb, a very direct allusion to the slow and painful ascension of the freed prisoner in Plato's Allegory. It is also a nod to the Socratic *maieutic* method – the process of helping someone give birth to their rational soul. Here, Morpheus plays the role of the philosopher guiding the escapees towards the light. It is only after Neo's second 'birth' that Morpheus can help him realize

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[49] Christopher Bobonich, "Elitism in Plato and Aristotle," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambride University Press, 2017), 298-318.

[50] Lenore J. Wright and Anne-Marie Bowery. "Socrates at the cinema: Using film in the philosophy classroom." *Teaching philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2003): 21-41.

[51] For detailed comparisons of *The Matrix* and Plato, see this anthology: William Irwin, ed., *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002).

that the Matrix is an illusion created by evil technological entities simply called 'the Machines'. Just like the escapee in Plato's Allegory, Neo feels the urge to go back in order to help the remaining enslaved humans free themselves. After a series of action scenes, Neo embraces his destiny as the messianic figure who will set humanity free from the Machines. This is made clear at the end of the movie, when a triumphant Neo confronts the Machines from a phone booth, then flies towards the sky, superman-style, to the sound of *Wake Up* by rap-metal group Rage Against The Machine.

*The Matrix* gestures toward the epistemological interpretations of Plato's cave insofar as it invites skepticism with regard to sensory information. However, the main connection is with a political interpretation of the Allegory, namely that nefarious entities are actively trying to deceive us through public discourse in order to keep us enslaved. As Potter and Heath remark, the Morpheus character clearly states that the enemies are not only the Machines, but also any person who chose the 'blue pill' or has not yet woken up. In this regard, the movie is a pamphlet against conformity, against the 'mainstream' discourse – it only attacks capitalism as long as capitalism demands such conformity.[52] The characters of Morpheus, Trinity, and, later, Neo are *Adbusters*-type *culture jammers*: subversive anti-conformists with knowledge of the true nature of reality. By contrast, the opinions formed inside the Matrix are usually devoid of real truth; they are valid only within the confines of this virtual reality. This is highlighted in the movie, for instance, when a character wonders if the taste of a given food inside the Matrix corresponds to its 'real' taste. On this view, framing a struggle through the referents of mainstream culture (the Matrix) is equivalent to arguing about the shape of the shadows in Plato's cave. This message especially resonates with *Adbusters'* statement that the only struggle that really counts is bringing down the corporations that enslave us.

Like *The Matrix*, anti-ads also involve (or imply) a knowledgeable maverick or rebel figure. Situated above the influence of the common rhetoric, this figure can tell the listener to disregard mainstream discourses and to heed her alternative message instead. It is generally *the others* who are blind to the illusions of the cave, the Matrix, or corporate-ruled society. Like Plato's Allegory, anti-ads appeal to a type of bias called the 'third-person effect'– the tendency to overestimate the effect of mass media on *other* people while underestimating our *own* gullibility.[53]Anti-ad creators also employ meta-discursive strategies to paint their opponents as "heavily implicated in rhetorical procedures," while they themselves are ostensibly innocent of such influences – speaking, to paraphrase Socrates in the *Apology*, "with the first words that come to their

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[52] Andrew Potter and Joseph Heath, *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture Can't Be Jammed* (Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2005). The recent cooptation of the 'choosing the red pill' narrative by Men's Right Activists has demonstrated this in a dramatic and very problematic manner, as described in J. B. Mountford, "Topic Modeling The Red Pill," *Social Sciences 7*, no. 3 (March 2018): 42.

[53] For a review, see Richard M. Perloff. "The third person effect: A critical review and synthesis." *Media psychology* 1, no. 4 (1999): 353-378.

mind."[54] On this view, creating a distance between oneself and rhetoric serves to discredit competing discourse. At the same time, it contributes to the legitimacy of orators in general by working as a discursive policing tool.[55]

Although, as we have seen, various similarities can be traced between Plato's Allegory and anti-ads, we suggest that, in the context of vaporwave and pedagogy, two important differences can be shown by revisiting Apple's 1984 ad. First, while in the Allegory there is at least *some* reality, or truth, associated with the shadows and objects inside the cave, whereas in Apple's ad, *no* truth is conceded to the brainwashing spectacle shown on the screen. After all, shadows exist because of, and in contrast with, light: the shadows in Plato's cave must still have *some* epistemological value, at least enough to bring some of the prisoners to realize that something is amiss and to want to ascend towards the light (or to make Neo question his reality and seek to escape the Matrix). Vaporwave takes this nuance further: by using techniques that draw attention to its own materiality, the microgenre makes the audience aware of unexpected affective ties with the material, and does so without building the thick walls of irony often associated with anti-rhetorical strategies. Second, the prisoners in Plato's Allegory come to understand the truth by making a strenuous and gradual ascension towards the light, while anti-ads seem to prefer a sudden change of perspective. In a flash of light, the prisoners of the 1984 Apple ad (and the teenagers of the Sega ad) are *made to understand* the superiority of the new product by a knowledgeable hero figure; similarly, culture jammers expect the public to be *shocked into* a critical stance toward consumerism. On the contrary, vaporwave creators make no attempt to convince the audience that they are exceptionally objective and above the influence of brands. The trope of the knowledgeable hero is rarely seen in the virtual space, or 'virtual plaza' in vaporwave parlance, where identities are blurred using multiple pseudonyms, and judgements are a collective, bottom-up process.

**Building a multimodal vaporwave pedagogy**

This article proposed at the outset that a multimodal approach can call attention to specific – possibly hidden – media ecologies and infrastructures. Such discoveries often take the shape of new technological mediations – here, we mean vaporwave, less as a clearly defined new music micro-genre than as the cluster of techniques through which vaporwave creations emerge from alterations of previous audiovisual media forms. Following van Loon, we contend that mediation is a process of "[...] 'coming-to-terms-with' exactly because it enables meaningful relationships between ourselves and the world; it immerses us into the work of 'making sense.'"[56] Yet this article has shown how a

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[54] Jon Hesk, *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens* (Cambridge University Press, 2000): 208.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Joost van Loon, "Modalities of Mediation," in *Media Events in a Global Age*, ed. Nick Couldry, Andreas Hepp, and Friedrich Krotz (London and New York: Routledge, 2009): 119.

multimodal approach can reach beyond contained mediations. Built around unfinished media objects such as vaporwave creations, the multimodal approach has the potential to reframe pedagogical perspectives. To do so, in-class pedagogical inquiry must entertain dialogue between the *result of creation* (i.e., a completed artistic object ready for distribution) and the *process of creation* (i.e., ongoing technical actions, including thoughts and concepts in view of the artistic object). Vaporwave epitomizes the latter mode because it rarely, if ever, escapes its processual media integration – a creative pattern built into the microgenre's emergence, rendering it subject to its own dissolution through re-combinations.

As we have explained, *The Matrix* has served Loignon well in his philosophy courses. Over the years, freshmen have learned about philosophical principles underlying Plato's Allegory, the dichotomy between true and false knowledge, mainstream discourses, and the commodification of resistance. We recognize the pedagogical value of this learning process, and acknowledge that other blockbuster films and popular artistic creations can be similarly used in our classes. For instance, one of the authors of this article (Philippe Messier), who teaches anthropology of media, has already discussed the globally popular track *Gangnam Style* (by Korean artist PSY) to introduce semiotics in class. *Gangnam Style* has provided Messier a way to address the affective relationships developed around syllables and tones carefully selected to resemble other languages. In class, students have learned that these vague yet meaningful utterances can be easily repeated without prior knowledge of Korean by fans across the globe. Students have also reflected on the music video's visuals of Korean capitalist exuberance – colors, scenes, and indexical infrastructures – which, even when depicted ironically, nonetheless resonate with upper middle-class people both in India (where Messier conducts research) and in Canada (where Messier teaches).

And yet, our view is that such learning processes remain insufficient. We have highlighted above how teaching philosophy with the example of vaporwave could be a valuable contrast to pedagogical activities shaped around *The Matrix*. Working from the intuition that *The Matrix* might be sending the wrong message about Plato's Allegory, Loignon has also used videos of an installation by artist Ryoji Ikeda, associated with microsound, a genre that influenced vaporwave.[57] After a brief seizure warning addressed to the students (itself a part of the experience of mediation), the classroom door is closed, the lights are turned off, the volume turned up, and a YouTube video of Ikeda's installation *The Transfinite* is shown.[58] The nine-minute sequence shot features glitch music synchronized with a stroboscopic progression of squares and lines in a wide dark space. In the video, visitors are seen interacting with the installation: moving about, occupying the space alone or in small groups, casting their own shadows, sitting, lying down, pointing, discussing.

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[57] Born and Haworth, "From Microsound to Vaporwave: Internet-Mediated Musics, Online Methods, and Genre."

[58] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omDK2Cm2mwo

Students are then invited to discuss the video in relation with Plato's Allegory. Here, common topics are the nature of reality and its possible mathematical structure, virtual reality, and the future of our species.

Similarly, to teach anthropology, we deem it advisable to place *Gangnam Style* alongside multimodal vaporwave creations, especially the one shown in Figure 5, by YouTube user Okiwont.[59]



Fig. 5: a screen capture from the YouTube video PSY – 리사 프랭크 420 / 현대 의 컴퓨팅, by Okiwont.

In this uncanny audiovisual creation, crafted from pieces of the original *Gangnam Style* music video, vaporwave's aesthetics – pastel colors, spatial perspective, degraded audio that reproduces the melody of the iconic *Lisa Frank 420* track – are reinforced by the kitsch bluescreen effect 'bleeding' across PSY's dancing and singing. The creation exaggerates an impression of the universalism of globally commodified song and dance by isolating PSY in a field of digital lines. PSY is nowhere and everywhere, situated in no specific material culture, and yet in all of them. Indexes, icons, and symbols of the 'rich' Seoul neighbourhoods alongside ostentatious consumption in the music video are replaced by a general emptiness of signification, pointing to a sort of parody fatigue. The digital constitution of the virtual environment in which PSY is dancing ultimately speaks to both the *Gangnam Style* phenomenon and vaporwave techniques, which have been embedded and unleashed by digital remediation.[60]

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[59] PSY - 리사 프랭크 420 / 현대 의 컴퓨팅, YouTube Video by Okiwont, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1t-hBkVdIas

[60] Richard Grusin (and Jay Bolter) famously coined the term "remediation" in 1996 after analyzing the digital media impact in the film *Strange Days* (1995). Grusin has

**Conclusion**

Our aim in this article has been to build on vaporwave techniques in order to improve college teaching practices, especially in humanities courses. The productive comparisons we have drawn between mainstream media and vaporwave creations lead us to conclude with a framework for a multimodal vaporwave-inspired pedagogical method for our classrooms.

First, we wish to emphasize that vaporwave's sound and image techniques as well as its playful re-ordering of media must be recognized for what they are: complex understandings of techno-social creations emerging, and enmeshed with, contemporary digital media evolutions and infrastructures. Although we can only speculate on their future trajectories, we believe that vaporwave aesthetics will most likely actualize the intricate relationships they have already forged with recent digital audiovisual devices and find new sources of 'taboo' material (e.g., early 2000s cellphone imagery, corporate drone footage, creative exploitation of popular Internet platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit). We thus need to critically integrate students' dynamic understanding of these evolving technologies into our teaching and our multimodal analysis of philosophical and anthropological notions. This process should also help students understand how previous media forms and techniques are potentially still relevant in the formation of new ideas. As we have demonstrated, vaporwave artists do not suppress the intimate affective relationships that students have developed with brands and consumption practices.[61] Instead, the artists integrate these socioeconomic connections and myths in the creative process. Conversely, we propose to investigate these lingering affects with students, not shying away from their productive capacity to reshape local media ecologies.

Second, we support a set of teaching methods which allow multimodal analysis to be closely associated with students' technical actions. A teaching activity inspired by this vaporwave approach may invite students to understand how copyrights function, or how audio/video samples and ideas are shared, cited, altered, and re-organized. Messier has observed that students who produce ethnographic films tend to reflect obliquely about anthropological concepts, as if they were re-discovering them just as they were working out how to communicate via new forms of media. Such exploratory learning processes might be expanded through a multimodal vaporwave initiative where students compose, experiment, and, importantly, rigorously research

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since suggested that perhaps the film *Minority Report* (2002) and the short story it was based on were also speaking to a form of "premediation" which occurs when mass media, for instance, 'premediates' certain events or potential issues (such as 'American media hysteria about anthrax exposure in the days shortly after 9/11'). One could argue that vaporwave has embraced such relationships by pre-mediating, and emphasizing how its own existence might be bound to remediation until disappearance. See Richard Grusin, "Premediation," *Criticism* 46, no. 1(2004): 17-39.

[61] Richard Swedberg, "The Role of Senses and Signs in the Economy," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 4, no. 4(2011): 423-437.

the material needed for their respective creations. An example of class assignment might be to imagine a new $X$-wave microgenre where $X$ is a theme studied in class, then select sounds and images that play with affect to convey complex ideas about $X$. For instance, if the mathematization of nature by modern philosophers was made into a wave-type genre, how would it sound/look like, and why?

Our view in this article draws from the work and insights of the artist Ramona Andra Xavier, who has produced music under multiple aliases, including Macintosh Plus. In 2012, she remarked that the vaporwave artists are essentially "curator[s] of samples."[1] The pedagogical application of this perspective entails having students unpack vaporwave creations and engaging them in the process of creating, or curating works of vaporwave art themselves. By learning to consider other types of documents with the mindset of a vaporwave artist – essentially thinking with vaporwave – students could develop valuable research and critical thinking skills. The collaborative process described in this article could then be broadened into a critical approach with which any kind of signal can be curated, mutated, and disseminated.

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