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Futurism and Musical Meaning in Synthesized Landscapes

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore how musicians engaged with a particular form of technology, the synthesizer, to create imaginative geographies of the near future. It examines the output of numerous 'synth-pop' acts involved in the production of this commercially successful, urban-focussed music, focussing on the period between 1977 and 1984. Attention is given to how this music both embedded and self-consciously reflected notions of futurism, a theme that, until that time, had largely been neglected in popular music. The role of earlier futuristic visionaries, such as Fritz Lang, JG Ballard and Stanley Kubrick, in shaping musicians depictions of futurism is highlighted. Throughout, the music is interpreted by situating it within the specific cultural, economic and sociotechnical realms in which it was produced. Whilst the emphasis is on debates concerning futurism that were played out within a British musical context reference is also made to related significant developments that occurred outside the UK.

This paper assesses the way that notions of futurism were enrolled into electronic music in certain times and places. Naturally, in many respects, all contemporary popular music is now 'electronic'; if not in its instrumentation then almost certainly in terms of its recording, distribution and consumption. However, my analysis of 'electronic music' refers to music in which electrically powered keyboard instruments, and specifically synthesizers, are to the fore of the mix, and where many of the sounds produced are clearly synthetically generated. In particular, the focus is on a form of electronic music, given the genre-label 'synth-pop' for marketing purposes, that was produced by artists sometimes referred to as 'futurists'. This music was characterized by simple, spartan arrangements and, unlike much of the 'progressive' synthesizer music that came before it, was largely devoid of rhetorical display. As the moniker 'futurist' implies, an overt engagement with ideas of futurism was a key characteristic that informed such music. The paper situates this embrace of futurism within an inter-textual terrain. Connections with parallel discourses in other art forms, notably film and literature, are highlighted, and special attention is given to the influence of earlier creative works on those musicians who explicitly sought to construct imaginary sonic geographies of the future. An attempt is made to outline ways in which the musicians responsible for such 'new' sounds positioned this output within a broader discourse on modernity and the near future, one which, in the UK in particular, was often linked in to representations of the built environment.

The focus for this paper is the period between 1977 and 1984. Several factors determine this start date. Firstly, by 1977 the initial fervour of the guitar driven punk movement was cooling. However, some key lasting consequences of punk were becoming increasingly discernible. One of these concerned the growing enthusiasm for the catalytic role that punk played in inspiring an increasing number of young people to adopt a DIY (do it yourself), non-virtuoso ethos to music making. By the late 1970s this notion had been extended beyond

guitar-based sounds and applied to musical expression centred on the synthesizer, an instrument that had, for the first time, begun to be sold at affordable prices. Andy Fletcher, a founding member of the synth-pop group, Depeche Mode, recalled that when models such as the MiniKorg 700s became available, "you could buy a monophonic synthesizer for about £150 quid. I think that was the main reason for the explosion in electronic music at that time. It was basically about affordability."[1] The second reason for choosing the start date of 1977 is that another consequence of the punk movement was that it helped create a basic institutional framework to facilitate the production, distribution and selling of types of records which previously had been poorly or non-served by established music industry networks. This benefitted new, and initially experimental, forms of music, such as synth-pop. Thirdly, the end of the 1970s marked a time when conditions were benign for musicians who needed free or low rent spaces in which to rehearse and play live. The industrial decline that the UK had experienced for much of the preceding decade had resulted in a surfeit of vacant and derelict properties that young musicians took advantage of, which assisted in the creation of vibrant local music scenes across the country.

Finally, the late 1970s was a period in which science fiction portrayals of the future moved into the mainstream of popular culture. One interpretation that has been put forward to attempt to explain this is that people embraced imaginary worlds such as science fiction as a partial reaction to the harshness of the real environment in which they lived. Similar reasons were given, shortly afterwards, for the embrace of the period exotica of pirate, clown, or Culloden warrior[2] associated with the New Romantic fashion movement. As music writer Jon Savage noted, "the truism about the 1970s was its grimness. Yet for many it marked an explosion of fantasy."[3] Fantasy worlds were depicted in George Lucas' film *Star Wars*, released into cinemas in 1977, and in Space Invaders – the first game that tracked and displayed high scores – which was originally manufactured and sold in Japan by Taito, and then licensed for production in the US by Midway.[4]

The enthusiastic response that greeted their arrival was symptomatic of the fact that the idea of 'the Future' began to exert a hold on the popular imagination in the late 1970s, which continued until the middle of the next decade. One possible reason for this relates to profound uncertainty about the prospects for the future. Economically, some areas in the UK appeared to be becoming lost causes, a mood later captured in Aztec Camera's 'Killermont Street' (1987). This song was named after the road that houses Glasgow's coach station and detailed

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[1] Quote taken from an interview recorded as part of The BBC 6 Music documentary 'The Great Bleep Forward: episode 2'. Produced for 6 Music by Jim Simmons and Sue Clarke. Presented by Andrew Collins. Broadcast on 28 July 2010.

[2] These three particular guises were adopted at the end of the 1970s and start of the 1980s by, respectively, the pop acts, Adam Ant, David Bowie and Spandau Ballet.

[3] John Savage, *Time Travel – From the Sex Pistols to Nirvana: Pop, Media and Sexuality, 1977-96*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), p. 121.

[4] Paul Morley, *Words and Music: A History of Pop in the Shape of a City*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), p. 167.

the exodus of workers to London and the South. The Specials captured the potential consequences of such an exodus on a city on their No. 1 single, 'Ghost Town'. The song was interpreted as being about their home town of Coventry but went on to become an anthem for all post-industrial cities, its bleak message appearing to echo Johnny Rotten's feral refrain of "No Future" in The Sex Pistols' song 'God Save The Queen'.

Such an outlook also resonated with another conversation that was repeatedly played out in the popular media of the early 1980s. This concerned the possibility of Armageddon being brought about by the then seemingly real threat of a nuclear holocaust. On television this was enacted in drama, as in the BBC's 'Threads' (1984), set in post-bomb Sheffield, government information messages, documentaries, and even demonstrated by comedy, as in 'Bomb' (1982), the fourth episode of the sitcom series, *The Young Ones*. The topic was also repeatedly addressed in popular music. Examples here included OMD's 'Enola Gay' (1980), named after the plane which dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan's 'Burning Bridges' (1980), which addressed the same incident, U2's 'Seconds' (1983), about the home assembly of an atomic bomb in a New York apartment, and Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 'Two Tribes' (1984), a satirical response to the USA-USSR arms race, and the only song beginning with the sound of an atomic air raid warning to have topped the UK singles chart.

The choice of an end date of 1984 for the topic examined in this paper has, again, been selected for numerous reasons. Firstly, by this time, the previously revolutionary technology of sampling was becoming widespread. This approach helped to forge novel ways of making music by blending together previously unimaginable sonic inputs. To some the opportunities that the new sampling technology offered appeared limitless, a view held by Hank Shocklee, co-producer of New York hip-hop group Public Enemy:

> We took whatever... threw it into a pot, and that's how we came out with this group ... We believed that music is nothing but organized noise. You can take anything – street sounds, us talking, whatever you want – and make it music by organizing it.[5]

However, in addition to stimulating such experimentation, sampling also encouraged an element of curatorship to be embedded into the fabric of popular music. Rather than being shunned, as had often previously been the case, sounds from pop's own past increasingly came to be excavated, re-visited and re-mixed. Partly as a reaction to fears over 'fakery' associated with synthesizers and sampling, a musical ideology which presented itself as being concerned with issues of supposed authenticity gathered momentum. This essentially conservative movement received a significant boost with the success of the Live Aid concerts held in London and Philadelphia in 1985. These vast shows were orchestrated around traditional modes of live performance and the big screens and zoom lenses of the multi-camera production eulogised bodily toil, visible displays of endeavour and sweat, rather than

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[5] David Toop, *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), p. 123.

the static detachment associated with many synth-pop acts. Perhaps the most celebrated performance at Live Aid was that provided by Queen. Earlier in their career, the band had enthusiastically promoted spurious notions of authenticity and supposed musical virtuosity by placing stickers on their albums that proclaimed "no synthesizers!" The fact that in the early 1980s Queen themselves also briefly adopted synthesizers reflected the instrument's increasing ubiquity,[6] which prompted a discernible reaction against it. Acts such as The Eurythmics and Depeche Mode, who had started out as purely electronic acts, began to release records that were increasingly guitar orientated. Even The Human League, once at the vanguard of popularizing machine music – a group whose first name was The Future and who began their career creating synthesizer enabled works such as 'The Dignity of Labour' ep, a "four-part story of Yuri Gagarin's first space flight set to krautrock" (Rogers, 2011: 2) – chose to emulate Queen's example by attaching stickers to their albums that stated "no sequencers!"

And, finally, and perhaps most terminally, by the middle of the 1980s, the theme of futurism in music sounded increasingly hackneyed and was becoming, at times, a parody of itself, a situation later lampooned by the comedy duo, Flight of the Conchords, in their song, 'Robots':

> *The distant future,*
> *The year 2000,*
> *We no longer say "Yes," instead, we say "Affirmative."*
> *Unless we know the other robot really well.*
>
> *The humans are dead.*
> *Binary solo!*
> *000000111*
> *Once again, without emotion, the humans are dead.[7]*

Synthesizers and Musical Articulations of Place

In the late 1970s, the newly formed Sheffield based trio, Cabaret Voltaire, became interested in the possibilities electronics offered with regard to musically depicting their home city. The harsh, apparently alienating sounds the group produced were interpreted and promoted, along with the early output of The Human League, as being emblematic of the apparently bleak, forbidding post-industrial landscape often associated with the South Yorkshire city in the late 1970s. Elsewhere, the formative work of many other bands whose music was also largely distinguished by synthesizer enabled sounds, such as Liverpool's Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, Glasgow's Simple Minds, Manchester's Joy Division and London based acts, including The Normal, Gary Numan, and John Foxx, all frequently referenced the supposedly disruptive impact of their external surroundings. This music engaged with landscapes of modernity and human relationships experienced within them.

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[6] Queen even dabbled with futurism by incorporating aspects of Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* into the promotional video for one of their songs, 'Radio Ga-Ga' (1984) and by recording the theme song to the British sci-fi film, *Flash Gordon* (1980).

[7] Lyrics to Flight of the Conchords' 'Robots' (2008), written by J. Clement, B. McKenzie and T. Laing. Publishing administered by Sony/ATV Tunes LLC (ASCAP) and Toby Long.

Pet Shop Boys lead singer Neil Tennant recently stated "pop music is a diary of contemporary culture. You can listen to a good pop record and it's rooted in time."[8] Arguments can also be put forward that it may well be rooted in place. The music journalist Paul Morley, in an essay about the evolution of the successful synth-pop group, Yazoo, noted the impact on the group's two members of growing up in an Essex new town amidst the functionalist concrete buildings (Figure 1) – a style of architecture later labelled 'brutalist'[9] – alongside the colour and excitement of the principal popular culture movements of the time:

> Music was one way of dealing with the 70s realities of life in Basildon for those born in the 60s. Imagine being a certain teenager in 1977 Basildon when all at once there was disco, punk... *Star Wars*, Parliament and Abba: imagine processing all that information – 'Anarchy', 'Stayin' Alive'... robots, bleeps and space ships – all at the same time. You could only do it using machines.[10]

Figure 1. Southernhay, Basildon. Photograph by Francis Frith. c. 1965.
Featured in the booklet to Yazoo's CD box set *In Your Room*. Mute Records, 2008.

In addition to the built environment and contemporaneous popular culture providing reference points, many of these synth-pop acts also derived inspiration from prior art works that had portrayed depictions of the future. Stanley Kubrick, via films such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork Orange*, presented contrasting, though equally bleak, representations of the near future. The impact of the latter on musicians was strengthened by Walter Carlos's soundtrack on which "Purcell, Rossini, Beethoven and Carlos's own music were all given electronic treatment which suited the futuristic vision of the film's creator"[11]

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[8] Quote taken from 'Secrets of the Pop Song: Breakthrough single'. Produced and directed by Linda Brusasco. Renegade Production. Last Broadcast on BBC Two, 9 July 2011.
[9] The utopian futurism sometimes attributed to such architecture is currently being restated by the likes of artist Laura Oldfield Ford and writer Owen Hatherley (2008).
[10] Sleevenotes to Yazoo's *In Your Room* CD box set (Mute Records, 2008).
[11] Mark Prendergast, *The Ambient Century: From Mahler to Trance – The Evolution of Sound in the Electronic Age*. (London: Bloomsbury; 2000), p. 71.

Whilst the work of Carlos, and that of later electronic producers such as Giorgio Moroder and Brian Eno, exerted a notable sonic influence on the new futurists, the novels of JG Ballard, particularly *Crash*, were, thematically, of equal importance. The Human League's Phil Oakey, has continued to acknowledge the author's influence, "We love JG Ballard. Roxy [Music] had a song, '2HB', about Humphrey Bogart and we [The Human League] had a song '4JG', which was about Ballard."[12] The Normal's Daniel Miller[13] was similarly in awe of the Shepperton based novelist, with *Crash* providing the major influence for their song, *Warm Leatherette.* This breakthrough hit for the group, featured lines such as "*Hear the crushing steel/Feel the steering wheel... Join the car crash set*", was delivered in a monotone, almost robotic style, characteristic of a great deal of synth-pop music.

Other works co-opted by pop futurists in the late 1970s and early 1980s included those associated with the Futurism art movement, led by Filippo Marinetti, in the early years of the twentieth century. The title of Marinetti's 1914 modernist sound poem 'Zang Tumb Tumb' was chosen as the name for one of the 1980s more forward thinking record labels, ZTT. The acts on this company's roster included The Art of Noise, Frankie Goes to Hollywood and Propaganda. Besides the label's name, another instance of ZTT drawing on past manifestations of futurism was provided by Propaganda's hit single 'Dr. Mabuse', the title of which a reference to the 1933 futuristic fantasy, *The Testament of Dr Mabuse,* directed by Fritz Lang

In addition to drawing on motifs of urban modernity and previous artistic representations, the futurists' vision was also largely driven by significant changes in music technology and their access to it. As already stated, in the late 1970s this new generation of musicians were aided in their quest to create explicitly futuristic work by the availability of newly affordable forms of technology. Most significant in this context was the synthesizer, and, more specifically still, the MiniKorg 700s, a model credited by The Human League's Phil Oakey as being "the first affordable synth."[14] In addition to being cheap, even less of a musical education was required to play this instrument than was needed to play the guitar, the instrument most central to punk's ethos of simplicity. As one of the pioneers of British electronic music, Gary Numan, has stated, the new music culture was not about "chord structures and so on. It was much more to do with arranging noise and sound. We became shapers of sound."[15] The MiniKorg 700s, and other models such as the Yamaha DX7, provided a mimetic means with which to evoke the industrial and urban sounds that many of these 'non-musician' musicians heard on a daily basis. They brought to fruition the wish that Robert Moog expressed in 1973

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[12] Quote taken from the documentary 'Synth Britannia'. BBC Productions, 2009. Produced and Directed by Ben Whalley. Last broadcast on BBC Four. 2.8.2010. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00n93c4

[13] Arguably Miller's greatest contribution to this movement was not as an artist but as a producer and record company boss. He formed Mute Records to release his own records and went on to sign and record influential synthesizer based acts including Depeche Mode and Yazoo and later compiled the work of Cabaret Voltaire.

[14] Quote taken from 'Synth Britannia'. BBC Productions, 2009.

[15] *Ibid.*

when he patented his synthesizer as being a machine "intended to make any sound available through electronic synthesis"[16]

However, it is worth noting that the 1970s generation of musicians were not the first to promote the idea that equated sounds associated with modernity with a desirable element of mystery. Well before the invention of the synthesizer, rapid changes in the auditory landscapes of cities were captured onomatopoeically in symphonic works such as 'Ameriques', written by the French composer Edgard Varese, in response to feeling captivated by his new surroundings in 1920s Manhattan. Furthermore, significant experiments in the electronic manipulation of sound were undertaken in the late 1940s and 1950s by the Paris based *musique concrete* pioneers Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry. Some of their ideas were then developed in the 1960s by, among others, the New York composers John Cage, Terry Riley and Steve Reich; the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop, best known for the futuristic sounding theme to *Dr. Who*; the London based producer Joe Meek, especially on the none more space-age sounding hit, 'Telstar', recorded under the name Tornados; and, finally, The Beatles, in tandem with their producer, George Martin, as on tracks such as the futuristically titled, 'Tomorrow Never Knows'.

A consequence of such varied approaches was that by the late 1970s more and more popular music produced was reliant on National Grids to achieve its effects. Increasingly, musicians were using machines to comment upon society's increasing reliance on machines. This theme was addressed, for example, in the album *Man-Machine* (1978), recorded by Kraftwerk, a group made up of four synthesizer players. This Dusseldorf based act first came to the attention of the majority of the British public, and many of the musicians mentioned in this paper, in 1975, when they had their first hit single, 'Autobahn', and also appeared on an episode of BBC1's long running weekly instalment of futurity, 'Tomorrow's World'.

Despite the new electronic music technologies being promoted on television and their increasing availability on High Streets in the late 1970s, many creators, including John Foxx and members of The Human League and Soft Cell, first sampled these new sonic possibilities by enrolling in art colleges. These institutional spaces were well known for facilitating and encouraging experimentation and, from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, in particular, provided a lacuna for the fermentation of ideas and a site in which practical skills could be taught and passed on.[17] It was also in such spaces that individuals who would go on to form glam rock acts such as Roxy Music, Be Bob Deluxe, David Bowie, first developed their interest in 'retro-futurism'. Such thinking was driven by nostalgia for outer-space themes prevalent in popular culture and in discourses surrounding design in the 1950s and which informed the content, dress and imagery associated with these art-school educated glam rock acts, as demonstrated by the sleeve to Be Bop Deluxe's second album, *Futurama* (Figure 2).

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[16] Paul Morley (2003), p.163.
[17] For a detailed critique on the importance of art colleges and art departments in the evolution of British popular music, see Simon Frith and Alan Horne's *Art into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987).

Figure 2. Be Bop Deluxe album, *Futurama*. EMI Records, 1975.

Non-European Approaches to Futurism in Popular Music

The lead singer of Be Bop Deluxe, Bill Nelson, later continued to immerse himself in such retro-futurist nostalgia in his solo career. However, he also engaged in a more contemporaneous take on futurism via his involvement as a part-time guitarist with the Tokyo based trio, Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO). YMO's music was labelled 'techno-pop', a term used almost exclusively in relation to electronic music produced in Japan in the late 1970s. The 'techno' part of the compound was a reference to the fact that a number of Japanese artists believed that depictions of their country at the time were being exoticised through a new form Orientalism that assumed an alignment between Japan, its people and technology.[18] Meanwhile, the 'pop' aspect spoke to the genre's stronger emphasis on melody and song structure than had previously been discernible in most electronic music. Yellow Magic Orchestra spoofed Western representations of Japan via their music, as demonstrated by the Space Invader sounds throughout 'Computer Game', their 1980 UK top 20 hit, and by the visual imagery they adopted, as highlighted by the cover to that release which featured a geisha-cyborg with electrical wiring sprouting from its skull (Figure 3).

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[18] Kevin Milburn, *Exotica, Self-Reflexive Orientalism and Hybridity: A case study of Yellow Magic Orchestra*. (MA Japanese Cultural Studies dissertation. Birkbeck, University of London, 2006).

Figure 3. Yellow Magic Orchestra single, 'Computer Game (Theme from the Invaders)'. A&M Records, 1980.

A baffled *Washington Post* critic reviewing a Yellow Magic Orchestra concert in 1979 described it as follows: "Transistorized Tchaikovsky, Diode Disco, Robot Rock ... [YMO] preferred to let their gadgets do their work for them ... at times, it wasn't clear whether the men were playing the machines or vice versa."[19] Both the tone of the comments and the choice of words, such as 'transistorized' and 'robot', allude to what Morley and Robbins[20] referred to as a 'Japan Panic' in the USA in the late 1970s and 1980s. But they also provide a reminder that, "throughout this century of rapid technological change, the drive of modernism has been harnessed to the dances and songs of machines."[21] This was a drive that accelerated in the second half of the twentieth century when the dance became more frenetic due to the increasing number of machines and their enhanced capabilities.

In the early 1980s, the futuristic sounds produced by artists such as Kraftwerk and the Yellow Magic Orchestra mutated in new settings and cultural contexts when they were incorporated by the Bronx based artist Afrika Bambaataa, and his producer Arthur Baker on the releases 'Planet Rock' (1982) and 'the Death Mix ep' (1983) respectively. The former was hailed as

> the first electro record: Euro-based electronic beats incorporating New York rapping. As such it was the forerunner to both hip hop and House... As it [electro] went overground in 1984, hip hop replaced it as the dominant underground force. [22]

In addition to being credited with helping to create a new genre of music, Bambaataa is also a significant figure in the context of this paper due to his influence in resurrecting sci-fi and futuristic motifs. This a theme which has run through many varieties of African-American

[19] Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture*. (Trumball, CT: Weatherhill, 1997), p. 301.

[20] David Morley and Kevin Robbins, 'Japan Panic', *Spaces of identity: global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 147-173.

[21] David Toop, *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds*. (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), p. 73.

[22] 'The A to Z of the Eighties', *Melody Maker*, (Author Anon), 23rd December 1989, p. 38.

music during the last fifty years, in work made by, among others, Sun Ra, George Clinton, Herbie Hancock, and most recently, Janelle Monáe.[23]

Lyrically, Monáe's debut album, *Archandroid* (2010), looks forward in that it casts "Monáe as Cindi Mayweather, a robot messiah sent back from the future to liberate us from the oppressive machine."[24] However, it is also informed by the past, comprised, as it is, of the "two central suites of a four-part conceptual piece inspired by Fritz Lang's silent-era classic, *Metropolis*",[25] an influence referenced on the album's cover artwork (Figure 4).
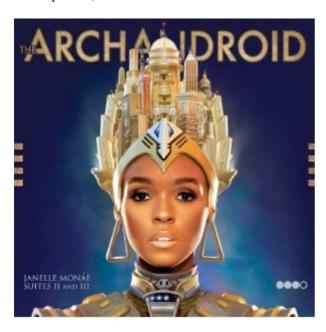

Figure 4. Janelle Monáe album, *Archandroid*. Atlantic Records, 2010.

The presence of the past on the record is further heightened by its clear incorporation of several earlier musical styles, which include sci-fi inspired funk and British progressive rock music from the early 1970s, as well as sounds associated with disco from the end of that decade and electro-pop from the start of the next, genres which all owed much to the deployment of synthesizers and electronic keyboards in their overall sound. Monáe's record thus continues a discernible trend concerning music that incorporates references to futurism, namely it reflects a tendency for it to be made by artists who embrace the creative possibilities offered by synthesizers, samplers and electronic keyboards.[26]

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[23] For further analysis of this tradition see M. Derry, 'Black to the future', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1993, 92 (4), pp. 735-78 and K. McLeod, 'Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism and Meaning in Popular Music', *Popular Music*, 2003, 22 (3), pp. 337-355.

[24] S. Yates. 'We're Not in Kansas Any More' *The Word*, August 2010, pp. 84-85: 85.

[25] *Ibid*. p. 84.

[26] The most obvious way such acts have aligned their work to themes of the future has been via by their titling strategies, whether applied to individual tracks: Pop Will Eat Itself's 'Urban Futuristic' and Cut Copy's 'Strange Nostalgia for the Future'; themed albums, Soma Sonic's *Future* and Klaxons' *Myths of the Near Future*; group names, The Future Sound of London, or even entire genre-labels such as the axiomatic 'Futurist' and 'Techno'.

Conclusion

The music writer Simon Reynolds recently suggested that the idea explored by many of the artists mentioned in this paper, of pop as a modernist celebration of the fleeting ambiguity of music's emotional power, is an outlook perhaps best viewed as historically situated. He contends that

> what seems to have happened is that the place that The Future once occupied in the imagination of young music-makers has been displaced by The Past: that's where the romance now lies, with the idea of things that have been lost. The accent, today, is not on discovery but on recovery.[27]

The journalist Steve Yates, reviewing Reynolds' latest book, *Retromania*, noted that the author "came of age in the post-punk era... and has never lost his attachment to futurism, the idea that art should be one long forward march, any which way but backwards."[28] But even in post-punk times, the chronology was never so straightforward, and during that most future-facing period, musicians instinctively looked back to go forward. As this paper has sought to demonstrate despite professing to be about issues of futurity, the post-punk Futurists drew considerable inspiration from prior artistic representations of the rise of machine culture.

To summarise, an attempt has been made here to outline how futurism in music can be explored in relation to the manner of its production and its thematic content.[29] This paper commented on ways in which a futuristic urban ethos was made explicit in much of the electronic music produced in the UK, and elsewhere, between 1977 and 1984. During this period there was a growing mainstream interest in science fiction and futurism, an optimistic response to the potential of technology that found expression via the medium of popular music. The paper then moved on to outline how 1970s synthesizer based music informed aspects of black American music that also engaged with futurism, such as 1980s electro and more recent funk and soul acts. These contemporary examples, like much of the preceding synth-pop, were noted as being at least as concerned with celebrating and re-imagining earlier depictions of the future as with creating wholly original new conceptions of it.

In conclusion, this paper has stressed the opportunities that an engagement with music can offer researchers who seek fresh perspectives on issues of representation, modernity and futurism. It also stressed the temporal, spatial and sociotechnical specificity related to the environment in which a commercially successful type of music was produced and consumed, one that explicitly imagined how music might sound in the future and should sound now.

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[27] Simon Reynolds, 'Total Recall', *The Guardian, G2*, 2.2.2011, pp. 4-7: 7.
[28] Steve Yates, 'Pop Has Eaten Itself', *The Word*, June 2011. p. 94.
[29] Alternative music futurism and landscape perspectives that one could adopt include those that focus more on the distribution of music (Leyshon, 2003), or on the increasingly mobile nature of its consumption (Bull, 2007).

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