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Introduction

Three reference tracks were chosen by the author in order to be critically analysed pertaining to the varying but distinctive musical characteristics they possess. These characteristics (instrumentation, time signature, effects, tempo, etc.) define a 'genre' similarly to how grammar and other rules applied to utterances and sound, define what language is.

But why is genre important? Reoccurring conventions in similar tracks are indicative of recognisable pattern that form in the audience's minds, thus the audience becomes used to this genre and vice versa - the people making the music of this genre now know who their audience is. Different people will have grown up listening to a certain genre, grown accustomed to and enjoyed and many styles, because of the social context involved in its creation, will resonate more with others. With this in mind the umbrella categories of Rock, Jazz, Blues, R&B, Hip Hop, Folk, Dance, Electronic and more start to diverge into smaller 'sub-genres' that might provoke more thought and feeling for some people.

The aim in this thesis is to disambiguate and deconstruct each reference track to reveal its base elements in terms of composition, arrangement, instrumentation and other definitive characteristics. These results will be matched with research to support the claims of it belonging to the genre.

Lastly, we will explore three compositions that the author has created in Logic Pro, with the intention of emulating the musical styles chosen by closely following the genre's tropes. However the author will have exercised their stylistic liberty, possibly borrowing ideas that are more associated with other genres should the author see fit.

Future Garage/Post-Dubstep and SBTRKT's 'Right Thing To Do'

SBTRKT's 'Right Thing To Do' at first glance is a bass-influenced UK Garage track with soulful vocals provided by Jessie Ware. Pitchfork's Joe Colly has suggested that SBTRKT's self-titled debut album as a whole is, "closer to pop than his post-dubstep contemporaries James Blake or Jamie Woon." (Colly, 2011) Listening to songs like 'Wildfire' with its big, female-led Pop chorus and 'Pharaohs' with its electronic disco synths, it is clear that he doesn't stick to one genre. When choosing this reference track, the author's intent was to be able to pick something that allowed him to borrow from many genres yet the product still felt like it belonged to an existing sub-genre. Furthermore the author has a tendency to have the big hook that Pop choruses implore. So although the aim is to describe Future Garage, describing Post-Dubstep and all of its umbrella genres will be the most beneficial.



Figure 1: SBTRKT by SBTRKT
cover art (A Hidden Place, 2011)

Post-Dubstep "became a buzzword exhausted by the media" (Murray, 2014) to try describe the range of artists who were trying to move away from the drop-focused Dubstep that had become mainstream. Murray also suggests that there isn't a particularly defining sound about the genre and how it is more about pushing boundaries, using existing genres such as early 2000s R&B, UK Garage, 2 Step and ambient music with Dubstep techniques. Artists that have been credited as Post-Dubstep artists include Burial, James Blake and Mount Kimbie and by investigating songs like 'Archangel', 'Unluck' and 'Carbonated'; it could be argued that there is a unifying feeling elicited from them - perhaps it is the use of silence and organic sounds to create a surreal listening experience. So even though the elements are at the heart of a lot of dance music, the emotional depth of the music could suggest its preference to be listened to at home. Interestingly

enough many 'Post-Dubstep' artists have been credited also as Future Garage artists too implying the synonymity between the two; so unless stated otherwise, the two genres will be interchangeable from now on. Similarly to Post-Dubstep, Future Garage is characterised as 2-Step and UK Garage fused with "Detroit and Dub-Techno making futuristic and often very off kilter modern rhythmic production styles." (Mithun, 2010)

At a tempo of 135 BPM, 'Right Thing To Do' features a slightly delayed tuned percussion playing a intricately rhythmic melody and is accompanied by Jessie Ware's soft and brooding vocals. This relationship is a reoccurring motif in the song and should be seen as the A section of the song. The instrumental bass breakdown that happens right after the intro introduces the 2-Step drums (hi-hats on the offbeat, kick on beats 1 and 3 but 3 is syncopated, syncopated rim hit on beat 2) and a Dubstep-influenced wobble bass that plays a consistent 4 bar loop. This B section is reused as verses (with singing) and instrumental choruses (where there are pitched vocal chops). A repurposed A section occurs for the pre-chorus where the Garage drums are replaced with static eighth note snares and police sirens - creating some sort of tension that compliments the repetitive hook sung by the female singer. Like Dubstep, the instrumental bass breakdown acts as the release to the tension built up in the pre-chorus, just not as extravagant or up-front.

Future Garage/Post-Dubstep inspired, 'Dancefloors'

In hopes of emulating the style of Future Garage and Post-Dubstep, the author wanted to hone in on the contrasting feelings 'Right Thing To Do' evokes in each section; so the idea was to start off with drumbeat, move onto the melodic ideas and then arrange accordingly.

Set in common time and setting the BPM to 130.7, the author created a garage drum beat consisting of a kick that falls on every other downbeat, syncopated rimshot and toms and a consistent hi-hat on the offbeat. In order to free up some low-end in the mix in anticipation of a heavy sub-bass, a punchy kick with a short sustain and a focus on mids was chosen. MJ Cole describes the 'skip' feeling of UK Garage as being a main characteristic of Garage/2-Step and so, the MIDI drum pattern was edited to have a 50% swing to it using Logic's Time Quantize tool. Furthermore the skip is emphasised by the rim hit that plays on the 2nd beat being syncopated,

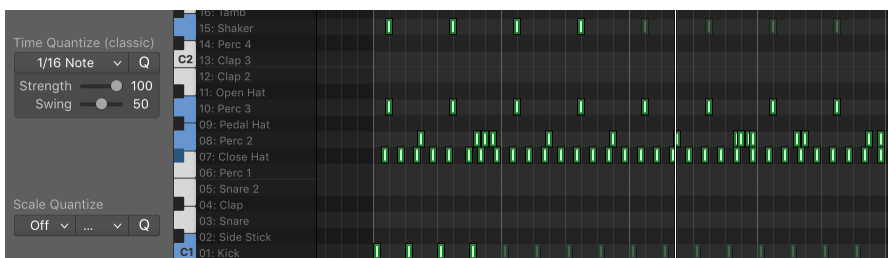


Figure 2: Logic's MIDI quantisation feature in use. First quantised together to 1/16ths and then the 50% swing is added

and every hit of the tom (which competes for room with the kick) being completely syncopated also. The swing found in Time Quantization is also used to humanise electronic MIDI drums, which are quite rigid.

The subbass provides a rhythmic push because of the Low Frequency Oscillator (LFO) rate being set to a dotted eighth note. With Jessie Ware's vocals and James Blake's 'Limit To Your Love' minimalistic *drop* in mind, the first 8 bars of the chorus is just the bass and a pad playing the same chord progression, creating a homophonic texture; allowing the soulful singing (also influenced by James Blake) to really take centre stage before the Garage rhythm section returns for the rest of the chorus.

One participant from an interview conducted did suggest that it could be Future Garage because of the ambient pads on top of a 2-step beat. The choice to use a large reverb was to put stress on the Ambient influences that Future Garage and Post-Dubstep are cited having. This same reverb is used for the pre-chorus melodic idea, and with the way that it is distant and behind in the mix, it commands a melancholic feel out of the composition. With reverb taken into consideration the lyrical subject matter becomes ironic; lyrics pertaining to the outgrowing feeling one gets to the dance environment against a danceable Garage-inspired track. MJ Cole suggests that a characteristic of Garage is its 'cheekiness' - spontaneous sounds and fills to signal a change of section. This piece however relies on muting instruments to signal a change (a soloed Hi-Hat

before the chorus) with reverb/delay tails to compliment the track's moodiness. The vocalist going from a brooding, low voice in the verse to a more passionate, higher-pitched vocal in the chorus is lent from the author's Pop/Soul tendencies.

As the track approaches the final third with the slow return of the sequenced melody, a chopped up vocal that is sampled from the first verse gradually morphs until the end where only the wet signal of the reverb remains. Using the PolyVox (polyphonic pitch shifter) feature in iZotope's VocalSynth, the sample is pitched up an octave to meet Garage's calling for pitched vocals. The Distort function was also enabled for stylistic preference but there is also a normal-pitch vocal chop that is echoed that plays with the VocalSynth signal.

Post-Punk Revival and Blood Red Shoes' 'It's Getting Boring By The Sea'

Punk was characterised by short time-length songs, power chords, raw and nasally vocals and energetic but simple patterned drums, produced in an uncomplicated way that gave a lo-fi Garage feel. Garage Rock that preceded Punk put a focus on fuzzbox-distorted guitars that played uncomplicated chord progressions with aggressive lyrics, creating a lo-fi quality by tracking the entire band on a tape recorder.

AllMusic has described Post-Punk as "a more adventurous and arty form of punk" (AllMusic, 2014). Many artists felt the need to experiment more with their music as the Punk music had become commercial and almost self-parodying as suggested by Simon Reynolds in his 2005 book, 'Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978–1984'. This resulted in artists borrowing more from non-Rock music. Artists like Joy Division whose Punk energy is evident, their music is haunting and eerie because of the unusual studio production techniques employed by Martin Harnett such as delayed, panned drums, an instance being in the opening of 'Disorder' where the snare feels cave-like because the instrument's attack is one side of the mix and the 'delayed release would be panned to the other side.' (Delaney, 2017)

According to rateyourmusic.com, early 2000s bands like The Hives, The Strokes and The Killers would hope to renew Post-Punk characteristics like "the emphasis on melodic basslines, a dominant 'live' drum sound, occasional use of synthesizers and often elaborated, interlocking guitar work" (rateyourmusic.com) with modern production techniques, thus removing the DIY ethics. Post-punk revival would become mainstream and would be interchangeable with Indie Rock music.

This reference track chosen is proof of that. The Blood Red Shoes song is at a fast 152 BPM in a 4/4 time signature. Even though the brash energy of the drums and simple chord progression of the distorted guitar are lent from post-punk, the modern production is there, the reverse clap that appears at 1:27 is an example and so is the panning of the delayed signal of the guitar in the intro.

Post-Punk Revival inspired track, 'PUNCHIN'

At 138 BPM and in 4/4, the author started work on the song by creating a riff using a distorted bass. The driven rhythm guitar plays barred chords following the bass line riff consistently throughout the song giving a crunchy mid in the mix. A second guitar panned to the right appears during the intro and post-chorus sections adding a duelling guitar feel similar to The Strokes' 'Reptilia'. The final leading guitar appears during the post-chorus and the second verse, playing single notes as a solo. As a nod to Punk, the song stands at 1:50.

The author, and vocalist for 'PUNCHIN', sings lyrics reminiscent of the socio-political subject matters Punk songs like the Sex Pistols', 'God Save The Queen' would feature. The reference track does not feature much political lyrics, speaking of the band's love hate relationship with Brighton, the instrumentation however, stays closer to Punk. The grungy feel of the song could be attributed to the the song's limited instrumentation consisting of only drums, distorted guitar, and both singers doubling up through the majority of the song. The lack of a low end is apparent but

adds to the Garage Rock/DIY idea. The vocals are shouty and brash but quite clean until the middle 8 section where the dynamics have escalated, where the female vocals are now shouted and put through some distortion and the male voice is put through some radio/megaphone effect.

The guitars were recorded via DI and effects chosen were crunch presets found in Logic's library. The drums were created with Logic's Drummer and were compressed with a low threshold and high ratio so that the dynamic range is consistently upfront. Interested by the megaphone vocal effect and the tension that it creates, the vocals in the verses emulate it. This was done by using the CLA Filter Vox preset in SSLChannel which creates a bandpass filter that hones in on about 1kHz. The idea for the chord progression change in the chorus comes from The Hives' 'Tick Tick Boom' with the author liking the momentary change in mood to something more optimistic. The mixing of the vocals here are also complimentary of this; they are clean, more in front of the mix and is accompanied by a second vocal track underneath singing at a lower octave.

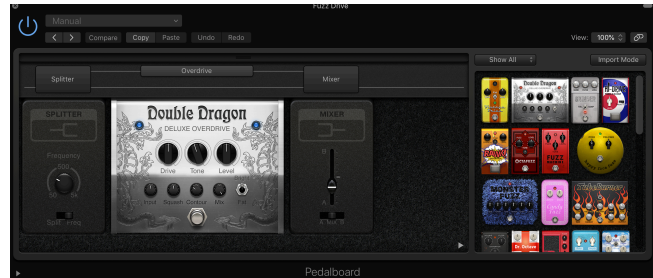


Figure 3: The settings used for the lead guitar in 'PUNCHIN' in Logic's Pedalboard Plugin.

Neo-Soul; Musiq Soulchild's 'Mary Go Round' and the inspired track, 'Secrets of Mankind'

Musiq Soulchild's, 'Mary Go Round' is a 2000 song released on his debut album, 'Aijuswanaseing' expressing his hurt for someone who hasn't reciprocated the love he has given. Set at 71 BPM, the song puts a big focus on Musiq's emotive vocals to express his hurt, over the same 8-bar loop. This 8-Bar loop consists of a wide spread chorus keyboard, drums where the kick and snare are consistent and the hi-hats are slightly swung, light strumming on an electric guitar during the chorus. Due to the light instrumentation, it could be suggested that the keyboard provide the stereo width of the song. The big parts of variation comes from the multiple vocal tracks that can happen. During the chorus at least two voices sing the main hook while a third voice riffs on top in a call and response fashion. The final chorus has 3 main vocal ideas happening: the vocal riffing, the main hook and quiet 'ahhs' to help beef up the finale.

In response to 'Mary Go Round', 'Secrets of Mankind' was created in collaboration male singer Iman Lake. It was written in 4/4 with a tempo of 74 BPM.

In results from research conducted with SurveyMonkey, many participants suggested the genre to be Soul. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with colleagues, the first participant who classified themselves as a Soul singer, had explained that the song should be categorised from the suggested genre because of how emotive the vocals are. Another participant suggested it to be Soul/R&B, and even mentioned a Future Soul because of the modern instrumentation included. Intended to be reminiscent of artists like D'Angelo and Erykah Badu, the instrumentation does intend to replicate the classic keyboard, bass guitars, electric guitar and drums combo. The main bass line is played by a synth bass, heavily compressed so that it stays close to the front of mix. The second verse adds two guitars, panned either side, adding variation and wider stereo image. The middle 8 section also plays around with the panned instruments with two bass guitars, the left side playing a laidback groove whilst the right is playing an improvised solo. The idea to do panned guitars and a bass solo was a personal stylistic choice, a feeling to suggest a bigger meaning to the "secrets of mankind" refrain in the middle 8. Used before in the 'Dancefloors' track, VocalSynth on the outro vocals brings something from the modern Pop world of production into throwback Soulful Hip-Hop.

Anne Danielson in her book, 'Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction' suggests that in the late 90s, Neo-Soul musicians experimented more with the manipulation of "grooves at the micro rhythmic level" (Danielson, 2010). In 'Secrets of Mankind', the drums are MIDI programmed into Logic with a lot of attention spent on making the drums sound and feel as human and groovy

as possible. A lot of variation in the closed hi-hat and open hi-hat, such as moving from playing triplet patterns to sixteenths during the middle 8. The kick has playful interchanges with synth bass throughout. Furthermore Logic's MIDI transform function, Humanize, was used on all the drums after programming them all; randomising the velocity by +/- 10 degrees and the note position and length by +/- 10 ticks. The author feels that they could have experimented more with the Jazz rhythms to emphasise Danielson's point; even perhaps borrowing a page from hip-hop's J Dilla who was part of the big Neo-Soul movement in the 90s, the Soulquarians. This refers to the Quintuplet and Septuplet swing where "alternating subdivisions are given unique durations, creating a long-short-long-short pattern." (Ludlow, 2018)

Neo-Soul has been cited to have a characteristic of delivering conscious lyrics. Greg Kot says that the subject matter "is idiosyncratic and personal, ranging from the spiritual crises of Hill, D'Angelo and Maxwell to the socio-political concerns of the Roots and Mos Def." (Kot, 2000) *Secrets of Mankind* delves into lyrics concerning love, existential thought and escapism through dreams using extended metaphors, and so, the lyrics does have a mix of Lauryn Hill's spiritual thought and Musiq Soulchild's personal love troubles. Because of the dreaming motifs the singers utilises, it was a decision to keep most instruments dry. The author made a conscious decision to use reverb on the distant, high pitched synth that appears during the intro, before the middle 8 and then again in the outro - giving a somewhat dreamy indication of the transitions.

Conclusion

The author would have made many stylistic choices in producing of these songs without being able to evidence and recall the inspiration for doing so as it can come from any genre that links to something else that links to something else and so forth.

Many artists will create from a feeling or an experience without the limitation of being categorised in a genre; borrowing ideas from multiple places but creating something new. For example Ambient music was conceptualised by a hospitalised Brian Eno in his 1978 album, *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, whilst listening to 18th century harp music on a broken amplifier. The experience of barely audible music meshing with his surrounding presented him "a new way of hearing music - as part of the ambience of the environment just as the colour of the light and the sound of the rain were parts of that ambience." (Eno, 1978)

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