

MICHAEL FREEMAN: Discuss how an artist, group and/or band either conform to or resist the 'dominant ideology' of a relevant cultural context.

Features of revolution and resistance in the music of The Future Sound of London

“All I want is you to be free.” ([Androgynous 2008](#)).

“I didn't want there to be a revolution of technology, I wanted to revolutionise my soul to be more symbiotic with everything. The future can't just be technology; that would be a dangerous future.” ([Turner 2021](#): 21).

The Future Sound of London (FSOL), also known as Amorphous Androgynous, are Brian Dougans and Garry Cobain. FSOL began their journey in the late 80's with rave scene chart hit *Stakker Humanoid* ([Dougans 1988](#)). I will explore themes of revolution and resistance that is transmitted thematically and in abstract in their early work, but is more explicitly stated in later releases. They brought an innovative sound to a broad range of approaches, from dance and rave, to ambient and chill out sounds. Moving on from demands to continue producing sounds of this ilk the band innovated and took their trademark electronica sound and combined it with a psychedelia sound that harked back to sounds of the 60's and 70's ([Turner 2021](#)). However, FSOL were creating a new sound by combining their previous electronica forays with a rich panoply of studio recorded acoustic instruments and performers in the releases *The Isness* ([Androgynous 2002](#)) and *The Peppermint Tree & The Seeds Of Superconsciousness* ([Androgynous 2008](#)) as well as *We Persuade Ourselves We Are Immortal* ([Androgynous 2020](#)). *The Isness* and *Peppermint Tree* included a more explicit foray into political and human rights issues that can be traced back to Cobain's mercury poisoning from fillings in his teeth ([Lester 2015](#)). The bands hiatus from the late 1990's to early 2000's was never explained until the band started talking about this in interviews. Cobain had been becoming increasingly frustrated by health problems that he said he was plagued since their early days. He went travelling in search of answers and with the help of a Chinese medicine practitioner, discovered that it was mercury in dental fillings that had been causing all the health problems.

“Y’know, you can form your own conclusions about why we’re allowed to put mercury in our heads that obviously leaks into the body, and it’s a massive subject and a very big issue for people’s health around the world. Nevertheless, that then became deeper once I found the physical things, which I didn’t find immediately, not everybody realises that mercury fillings might be related to their health unfortunately. I found it relatively quickly, within a year, but suffered since adolescence with lots of things.” ([Barcode 1992](#))

This revelation is evidenced in the track “*The Galaxial Pharmaceutical*” ([Androgynous 2002](#)), on FSOL’s album *The Isness*, where the band expose the obsession with pharmaceuticals which excludes spiritual approaches to well being, a state of affairs promoted by the pharmaceutical companies.

“Please tell me mister policeman. Can’t you really toe the line. And float in inner-space? It’ll blow even your most criminally neglected mind” ([Androgynous 2002](#)).

This hegemony of the pharma companies stands in stark contrast to the health benefits of meditation, mindfulness and the healing effect of consciousness on the body ([Dispenza 2019](#)). The term “*The Isness*” is itself a term that turns up in the annals of meditation, for example in *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle.

“You accept the “isness” of this moment.” ([Tolle 2016](#): 206).

Then we have a great heresy. Self-cure without the aid of doctors or pharmaceuticals.

“Eventually, Cobain found a cure for his illness in a combination of “food, mysticism, and yoga”, mainly in India, where he learned about Ayurvedic medicine and “acquired the tools to self-cure”.” ([Lester 2015](#))

This pursuit of a healthy purity has similarities to the Straight Edge punk movement.

“I’d walk into the studio every day and Brian would go, ‘Fuck! This is a lot more interesting than going out and taking drugs and drink, pretending to be rock’n’roll.’ Potentially this was the new rock’n’roll – becoming as pure as possible to find some clarity.” ([Lester 2015](#))

It’s revealing to compare this with the lyrics of the Ian Mckaye song.

“I’m a person just like you
But I’ve got better things to do

Than sit around and fuck my head
Hang out with the living dead.” (Threat 1984).

In what historical context did we end up in this state of affairs where’s people’s health becomes ruined by what purports to be an “advanced” health system ?

After the heights of the Moon landings in the 1960’s and early 1970’s an initially promising future of manned space exploration came to a standstill in deference to unmanned robotic probes and rovers (Slakey 2008). Promised Moon and Mars bases were put on hold. “The future” descended into advances almost exclusively in computing and internet technology. Yet many EDM music releases continued to use audio samples of the moon landings (Matthew, 2019). However eventually an endeavour by NASA to encourage private space flight paid off (Rohrabacher 2004). Elon Musk and SpaceX started launching rockets at vastly reduced costs that will one day take us to manned Moon and Mars colonies. Colonies that have been depicted in a thousand pieces of Science Fiction artwork were suddenly back on the books again (Dodd, 1990). Yet simultaneously a curious thing happened. While technology and space exploration raced ahead, the medical profession got left behind.

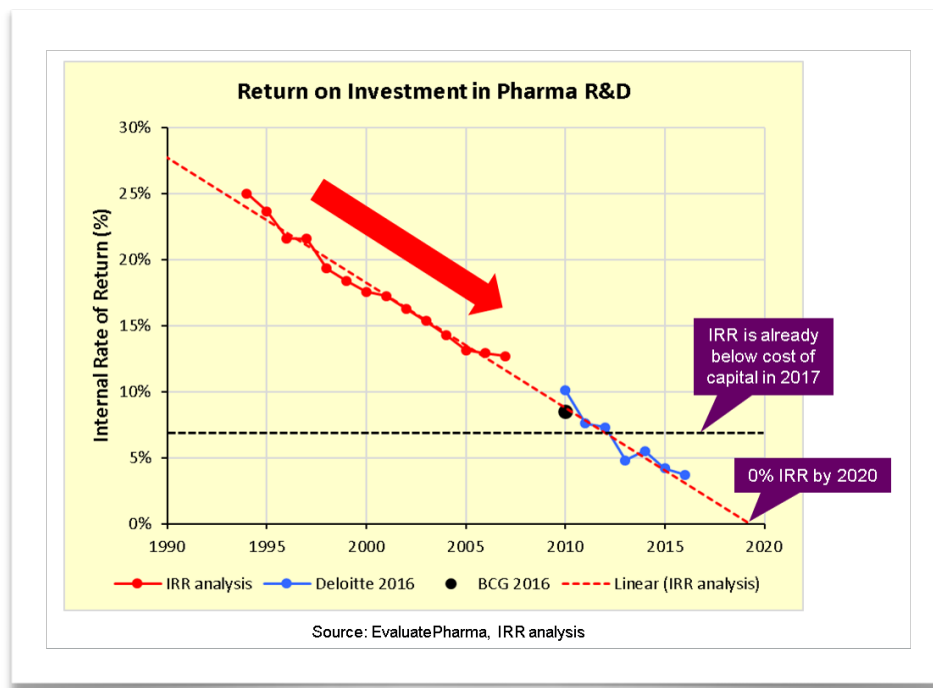


Figure 1 EvaluatePharma. 2017. Return on Investment in Pharma R&D.

According to Stott (Figure 1) return on investment for the pharmaceutical industry has been crashing due to lack of innovation.

“Now the scariest thing about this analysis, is just how robust, consistent and rapid is the downward trend in return on investment over a period of over 20 years. But moreover, these results confirm that return on investment in pharma R&D is already below the cost of capital, and projected to hit zero within just 2 or 3 years. And this despite all efforts by the industry to fix R&D and reverse the trend.” (Stott 2017).

Medicine was not just slow to innovate. Many parts of the medical profession had turned into a form of hegemony. The word hegemony comes from the Greek: *hegemon* , *a chief or ruler*. Gramsci defines hegemony as ...

“1. The "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

2. The apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.” (Gramsci 1971: 12).

This is a hegemony that has encouraged various forms of resistance against it (Weber 2016). However, head on attacks on the dominant medical model have met with little success, while oblique resistance continues to inform those not aware of their oppression. Just as had been done with sampled references to the Moon landings, one form of resistance has been the use of vocal sampling in electronic dance music in such tracks as *Your Life* by Harvey & Muscle “*they do not want your children educated they do not want you to think too much*” (Harley 2010) as well as other works with more spiritually subversive vocals such as “*drunk on demonic delusions*” (Tarrentella 2001). This is similar to the themes of rebellion and resistance in Black Gospel music.

“Our captors had little idea that music could be expressive language and hence a tool of resistance, and even rebellion.” (YA SALAAM 1995)

“If subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is a public transcript, I shall use the term hidden transcript to characterize discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond direct observation by powerholders.” (Scott 2008: 4).

This insight clearly reveals the rebellion and resistance in the music of FSOL.

“Whereas in Amorphous it manifests itself in bringing forward ancient mysteries and *healing techniques* and ancient philosophies and spirituality through the lyrical idea.”
(My emphasis) ([Barcode 1992](#))

The Peppermint Tree and the Seeds of Superconsciousness contains the song titles *In Fear Of The Electromagnetic Machine*, *Listen Little Man*, and *An Absurd Consequence Of Living In Absurd Times*. The first could be a reference to the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest* which talks about “The Combine” as a machine-like consciousness that hums behind walls in corrupt institutions and enslaves people to it ([Keseey 1972](#): 5). *Listen Little Man* was a book written by the maverick healer Wilhelm Reich ([Reich et al. 1999](#)). Reich discovered many concepts of physiology and bodily functioning that are being accepted today. *An Absurd Consequence Of Living In Absurd Times* reflects the same theme of the peculiar nature of people being enslaved to the medical/industrial complex in the UK and USA. People who have been made to believe that pharmaceuticals and “ops” can help with everything do not seem to be aware that they are being subjected to a form of discrimination and abuse by a system that covers up hundreds of thousands of scientific studies that show that energy medicine such as Acupuncture, meditation and focused conscious attention can cure diseases as serious as cancer ([Dispenza 2019](#)).

Where did this idea come from that pharmaceuticals can fix everything and that there is “no proof” for other healing modalities? Marxist theory emerged out of industrialisation in the nineteenth century. Pharmaceuticals are basically a chemical form of machine. It was not this “machine making” power that oppressed people but in fact human consciousness itself that had become machine like ...

“By the so-called age of reason, in the mid-seventeenth century, the importance of rationality ascended to new heights. Disembodiment, in the alleged service of this rationality, had become the norm. Instincts and the immediacy of physical drives (such as sex) had become an embarrassment or worse. The subjugating power of the church reinforced this deepening split between mind and body. Finally, the supremacy of rationality congealed in Descartes’ “I think; therefore I am,” an iconic statement for modernity. The rest is history, for better and for worse.” ([Levine, 2010: 275](#))

Also today we live in a society that is often obsessed with perfection, a sort of machine digitalisation of human relations. Those with character or who are deemed to be a character

risk being sucked into this obsession with "digital" social precision. Is this why many examples of contemporary music sound so clinical ? This is a point that Izhaki makes so well.

“In practice, there is little challenge building a precise digital compressor. A quick online search will quickly yield a free algorithm for exactly such a compressor, *but it won't have character. Analog designs have a character due to their lack of precision, and each compressor is inaccurate in its own unique way.*” (My emphasis). ([Izhaki, 2018: 278](#)).

In the 1990's there was a growing awareness that there was a need to use digital music technology, a machine, to create character and spit it back into the face of the machine. FSOL expressed this in their work *Lifeforms* ([Future Sound Of London 1994](#)) that was an orchestration of digital and synthesiser technology into a cinematic landscape that overcame the limitations of the technology to produce a work that was life affirming and provided a form of commentary on the numinous of life.

“I think technology has become mass produced and factory based and technology, back in the day when you had your Moogs, was very much personalised electronics, and I think we've lost that. So a lot of technology really needs to be led otherwise it can lead you too easily. In a lot of electronic music, I hear it being too apparent that the technology has led the creative process rather than the human spirit, and that is something I won't lose, the ability to fight and to be maybe unexpected with technology.” ([Barcode 1992](#)).

The artwork that accompanied *Lifeforms* also reflected one of the band's key themes “*In the mind of a child*” ... ([Indo Tribe, 1992](#)).



Figure 2 Riphead Buggy G. 2007. From the Archives.

The artwork (Figure 2) depicts the mind of a child. This is a theme that goes right to the heart of industrialised countries existential crisis.

Childhood is a time when man exists in his completely natural state for a while unless he or she is lucky enough to retain this into adulthood. In childhood there is still a lack of differentiation between the outside world of reality and the internal world of the mind, of consciousness. This is not a “childish” state but the natural state of reality. A scientific awareness of this state first started coming into prominence in the early part of this century in Quantum Mechanics ([Capra 1975](#)). Physicists found that their focused attention on certain atomic and subatomic experiments was influencing the results. In the famous slit experiment, particles or “quanta” of light would behave, on the one hand, as particles or atoms of light, and on the other, as a wave or frequency. The result depended on the physicist’s interaction with the experiment. This is still controversial today as it suggests that consciousness is not a phenomenon exclusive to the inside of our brains and that there is a conscious interplay between ourselves and a conscious universe on the outside.

“This book marks a sharp dividing line between old ways of scientific thought and old experimental protocols, wherein, human qualities of consciousness, intention, emotion, mind and spirit cannot significantly affect physical reality, and a new paradigm wherein they can robustly do so!” ([Tiller et al. 2001](#): xi).

For many scientists this just smacked too much of a primitive mysticism, not fit to be studied by the “hard” sciences. The science fiction author Philip K Dick criticised this arbitrary division in a speech of his in 1972.

“It is the tendency of the so-called primitive mind to animate its environment. Modern depth psychology has requested us for years to withdraw these anthropomorphic projections from what is actually inanimate reality, to introject -- that is, to bring back into our own heads -- the living quality which we, in ignorance, cast out onto the inert things surrounding us. Such introjection is said to be the mark of true maturity in the individual, and the authentic mark of civilization in contrast to mere social culture, such as one find in a tribe. A native of Africa is said to view his surroundings as pulsing with a purpose, a life, which is actually within himself; once these childish projections are withdrawn, he sees that the world is dead, and that life resides solely within himself. When he reaches this sophisticated point he is said to be either mature or sane. Or scientific. But one wonders: has he not also, in this process, reified - that is, made into a

thing- other people? Stones and rocks and trees may now be inanimate for him, but what about his friends? Has he not now made them into stones, too?" ([Dick 1972](#): 9)

The experiments also crossed over into parapsychology, research that has been carried on by modern day scientists such as Rupert Sheldrake and Dean Radin. They produce research that flies in the face of materialism. These concepts may seem to be the ravings of modern day hippies but they go straight to the heart of the problem with “the machine” which separates so many people from full contact with a life that is often left behind in the “childish dreams” of childhood. The genius of The Future Sound of London is that they manage to put these sometimes difficult to understand concepts so effectively into their music.

In conclusion the music of FSOL contains themes of resistance and revolution that at first sight may seem naïve but go straight to the heart of modern day scientific and social crisis. Through their art the Future Sound of London resist against a tyranny, a hegemony, that claims for example that cancer is “incurable” in the face of evidence to contrary. The band create this approach in forms that create a secret discourse that represents a critique of power spoken behind the backs of the dominant ([Scott 2008](#)). FSOL’s resistance can be compared to the codes and messages secretly transmitted in Black Gospel music, which allows The Future Sound of London to challenge the pharmaceutical companies in a way that does not allow their message to be lost in a direct challenge.

Word count: 2750.

List of Figures

[Figure 1](#). EvaluatePharma. 2017. Return on Investment in Pharma R&D. EndpointsNews (online). Available at: <https://endpts.com/pharmas-broken-business-model-an-industry-on-the-brink-of-terminal-decline/> [accessed 13 January 2023].

[Figure 2](#). Riphead Buggy G. 2007. From the Archives. Discogs [online]. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/release/997603-The-Future-Sound-Of-London-From-The-Archives-Vol-1> [accessed 13 Jan 2023].

Bibliography

[ANDROGYNOUS](#), Amorphous. 2020. We Persuade Ourselves We Are Immortal. [sound recording: Vinyl]. fsoldigital.com. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/master/1844290-The-Amorphous-Androgynous-Peter-Hammill-We-Persuade-Ourselves-We-Are-Immortal> [accessed 19 Dec 2022].

[ANDROGYNOUS](#), Amorphous. 2002. The Isness. [sound recording: Vinyl]. Future Sound of London Recordings. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/master/32302-Amorphous-Androgynous-The-Isness> [accessed 19 Dec 2022].

[ANDROGYNOUS](#), Amorphous. 2008. The Peppermint Tree & The Seeds Of Superconsciousness. [sound recording: Vinyl]. fsoldigital.com. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/master/32312-The-Amorphous-Androgynous-The-Peppermint-Tree-The-Seeds-Of-Superconsciousness> [accessed 19 Dec 2022].

[BARCODE](#), 2006. When Art and Music Collide. Future Music. London: Exact Editions Ltd [online available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20110927235850/http://www.barcodezine.com/The%20Future%20Sound%20Of%20London%20Interview.htm>] [accessed Fri 13th Jan 2023]

[CAPRA](#), Fritjof. 1975. The Tao of Physics. Boston: Shambhala.

[DICK](#), Philip K. 1969. The Android and the Human. San Francisco: SF commentary. [online available at https://fanac.org/fanzines/SF_Commentary/sfc31.pdf] [accessed 13 Jan 2023].

[DISPENZA](#), Joe. 2019. Becoming Supernatural How Common People Are Doing the Uncommon. UK: Hay House Inc.

[DODD](#), Timm. 1990. Go up SpaceX's Starship-catching robotic launch tower with Elon Musk! [Citizen Journalist report]. Available at: https://youtu.be/XP5k3ZzPf_0 [Accessed 4th Dec 2022]

[DOUGANS](#), Brian. 1988. Stakker Humanoid. [sound recording: Vinyl] Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/master/32355-Humanoid-Stakker-Humanoid> [accessed 19 Dec 2022].

[FUTURE SOUND OF LONDON](#). 1994. Lifeforms. [sound recording: Vinyl]. Westside Records. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/master/6526-The-Future-Sound-Of-London-Lifeforms> [accessed 10 Jan 2023].

[GRAMSCI](#), Antonio. 1971. Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. 8th edn. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

[HARLEY](#) & Muscle. 2010. Your Life. [sound recording: CD]. Little Angel Records. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/release/2210315-Harley-Muscle-Solid-Passion> [accessed 20 Dec 2022].

[INDO TRIBE](#), 1992. In The Mind Of A Child. [sound recording: CD]. Jumpin' & Pumpin'. Available at <https://www.discogs.com/master/110505-Various-Earthbeat>) [accessed 13th Jan 2023].

[IZHAKI](#), Roey. 2018. Mixing Audio: Concepts, Practices, and Tools. 3rd edn. New York: Routledge.

[KESEY](#), Ken. 2005. One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest. London: Penguin Modern Classics.

[LESTER](#), Paul. 2015. 'Amorphous Androgynous: Raving and Drooling...' Louder [online]. Available at: <https://www.loudersound.com/features/amorphous-androgynous-raving-and-drooling>][accessed 15 Dec 2022].

[LEVINE](#), Peter A. 2010. In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books.

[MATTHEW](#), Terry. 2019. 'For All Mankind: Electronic Music on the Moon'. 5 Magazine [online]. Available at: <https://5mag.net/features/electronic-music-on-the-moon/> [accessed 10 Dec 2022].

[REICH](#), Wilhelm. 1999. Listen, Little Man! New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux.

[ROHRBACHER](#), Dana. 2004. 'H.R.5382 - 108th Congress (2003-2004): Commercial Space Launch Amendments Act of 2004'. www.congress.gov [online]. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/5382> [accessed 10 Dec 2022].

[SCOTT](#), James C. 2008. Domination and the Arts of Resistance : Hidden Transcripts. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[SLAKEY](#), Francis and Paul D. SPUDIS. 2008. 'Robots vs. Humans: Who Should Explore Space?' Scientific American sp 18(1), [online], 26–33. Available at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/robots-vs-humans-who-should-explore/>.

[STOTT](#), Kelvin. 2017. 'Pharma's Broken Business Model: An Industry on the Brink of Terminal Decline'. Endpts.com [online]. Available at: <https://endpts.com/pharmas-broken-business-model-an-industry-on-the-brink-of-terminal-decline/> [accessed 4 Dec 2022].

[TARRENTELLA](#), 2001. Karma. [sound recording: Vinyl]. Whoop! Records. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/release/108845-Tarrentella-Karma> [accessed 20 Dec 2022].

[THREAT](#), Minor. 1984. Straight Edge. [sound recording: Vinyl]. Dischord Records. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/master/9719-Minor-Threat-Minor-Threat> [accessed 20 Dec 2022].

[TILLER](#), William A, Walter E DIBBLE and Michael J KOHANE. 2001. Conscious Acts of Creation : The Emergence of a New Physics. Walnut Creek, Calif.: Pavior Pub.

[TOLLE](#), Eckhart. 2005. The Power of Now : A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment. London: Yellow Kite.

Michael Z Freeman (<https://linkstack.michaelzfreeman.org/>)

[TURNER^](#), Danny. 2021. The Amorphous Androgynous. Resolution. 21.4, 21-25. [available at https://issuu.com/resolutionmag/docs/resolution_v21.4_august_2021] [accessed 12 Jan 2023]

[WEBER](#), Daniel. 2016. 'Medical Hegemony'. International Journal of Complementary & Alternative Medicine 3(2). [available at <https://medcraveonline.com/IJCAM/medical-hegemony.html>] [accessed 13 Jan 2023]

[YA SALAAM](#), Kalamu. 1995. 'It Didn't Jes Grew: The Social and Aesthetic Significance of African American Music'. African American review.