Cut and Paste Culture - Sample-based Pop Music and its Analysis

PhD Workshop at TU Berlin (July 14th, 2017)

Since the 1980s, it's hard to think about pop music without considering the «cut-and-paste» method of sampling. Without a recognisable loss of quality, the digital technology of samplers enabled to copy fragments out of existing media material such as music, film and tv, or out of (pre-recorded) field recordings. Taking this cultural technique, hip hop, drum'n'bass, and various genres of electronic pop music emerged as new forms of musical expression. And with them new styles of producing, and new strategies of citing and referring to other people's works, musical eras, cultural contexts, and spatial configurations have arisen. Mash-ups, remixes, edits, dj-mixes, cut-ups, collages and others can be seen as specific forms of this culture. Through sampling as an intertextual practice, musicians and producers are commenting, deconstructing, and reframing meaning. Thus, we consider sampling as a double-sided phenomenon in both music production and methodological knowledge production.

Today, the technology of sampling is not only accessible to professionals but also to a wide range of people with amateurish backgrounds. With platforms such as YouTube, Soundcloud, and others it is quite easy both to gain new musical material to sample from and to publish new tracks reaching audiences distributed across the globe. On the level of production, music production software is available to many individuals globally at – at least in the case of cracked software – almost no charge. Finally, DIY approaches in music production and the practice of so called «bedroom producing» are widely spread.

We also observe that the dissemination of sample-based pop music caused new practices with heterogenous actors, for instance the practice of clearing samples with attorneys. It also heated discourses centred around legal and economic problems as well as ethical debates around musical creativity, the problem of individual authorship and the appropriation of other people's intellectual property or cultural codes, meaning and traditions. Today, producing, performing, publishing and exploiting of sample-based pop music are framed by these different cultural, technological, legal, and economic conditions that shape the aesthetics of sample-based pop music and vice versa.

With these developments in mind, we seek to organize a multidisciplinary workshop that focuses the analysis of sampling practices. The aim is to discuss the musical structures of sample-based tracks with special regard to their embeddedness into specific social conditions and cultural contexts. For this purpose the workshop is ought to address the following questions:

Sampling as a technique of musical production

- Who uses sampling techniques and which social, technological, cultural, legal and political environments shape the processes of producing, performing, publishing and exploiting sample-based pop music?
- How can we address the relations between original and copy as well as own and other material in these processes? How do music producers draw the fine lines between inspiration, appropriation, thievery, etc.?
- Which forms of creative processes can we observe and where, i. e. in which situations and contexts can we trace them?
- How is sampling related with (cultural) concepts such as performance or liveness? How does sample-based pop music take shape and change when performed live?

Musical analysis of sample-based pop music and the epistemic value

- How can we analyze sample-based pop music on a musical level and what kind of epistemic value can we draw out of it? If we isolate a sample out of the cultural reality, which context informations do we need to analyse it properly?
- What kind of (musical) functions do samples take over within tracks and songs?
- How is it possible to implement musicological findings in research based on cultural theory or sociology? Which theoretical and methodological approaches are useful to catch distributed and intertextual forms of authorship and creativity related with sampling practices?

The politics of sample-based pop music

- What kind of strategies, attitudes, and positions are laying behind different forms of sampling? How are producers (consciously or unconsciously) change meaning, carried by samples? What ethical guidelines are at play?
- How can we «read» different temporal and spatial contexts in sample-based pop music? What do certain sample strategies tell about the social and cultural environments of the producers?
- What does sample-based pop music say about «us», our popular culture and the social structures and dynamics we live in?

Target audience and format
The workshop calls for PhD-students from a broad range of disciplines that focus on popular music such as popular music studies, musicology, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, global studies, and more. In order to keep a productive workshop atmosphere, we plan to limit the amount of participants. If you are interested in contributing actively to this workshop, please send us your abstracts with a maximum length of 300 words and a short statement about how much time you plan for your presentation. Possible formats could encompass the presentation of a short paper (10 min plus musical examples), the discussion of a working paper (max. 10,000 words, previously shared with all participants) or the discussion of selected key texts/articles/books/etc. If you have any other ideas for formats, just let us know. Please also consider an appropriate amount of musical examples for analysis.

Schedule
Deadline for abstract submission: February 15th, 2017
Letters of acceptance: February 28th, 2017
Deadline for working paper submission: June 30th, 2017
Date of Workshop: July 14th, 2017

The Workshop takes place at the Institute of Sociology at TU Berlin.

Organizers
Georg Fischer (Technical University Berlin/Jäger und Sampler) & Hannes Liechti (University of Arts Bern/University of Bern/Norient/National Representative Switzerland IASPM D-A-CH).

Contact
Please send abstracts and papers as well as questions and other requests to
georg.fischer@innovation.tu-berlin.de and hannes@norient.com

In Collaboration with
IASPM D-A-CH – International Association for the Study of Popular Music, German-speaking branch &
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