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Introduction

This book aims to reveal, listen to, and analyze narratives behind popular music.

"It's sharing your narrative. That's what it is." This is how one of my interviews with U.S. electronic music producer Lara Sarkissian ended. We were discussing my research into sampling and I asked her why she had agreed to take part in this study. "It's sharing your narrative," she answered briefly and without much consideration. Being involved meant, for her, the opportunity to share her story, her viewpoints, her experiences of the world. It meant talking about and reflecting on her own position, which is considerably shaped by her affiliation with social minorities.

It's sharing your narrative. That's what it is.

Sarkissian grew up in the Armenian diaspora of the Bay Area in California. She took part in community events and parties, attended an Armenian elementary school, volunteered at the cultural diaspora organization Hamazkayin, and regularly visited one of the four Armenian churches in the region. Moreover, as a female producer, DJ, label owner, and concert organizer, she operates in a field which is, at the time of this study at the end of the 2010s, still prevailingly male-dominated. Her music in general, and her sampling practices in particular, reflect these personal experiences. Conducting research into her music—and finally, also, reading this book—means listening to her story. It means discovering her perspective.

Why should we do so? Why should you, the reader of this book, listen to the story of a "lonely" laptop producer at the fringes of electronic popular music? Why should we care about such an individual narrative far away from the musical mainstream? Because that is at the core of the enterprise of cultural anthropology: the attempt to listen to people, to analyze the acquired data, to generalize, and finally to make sense of our world. Moreover, in light of the emergence of postcolonial theories, it is also the task of research to question and challenge established power relations. If we want to do this, we especially need to listen to those on the other side of power, to those belonging to minority groups, to those at the margins of society, of our scope as researchers, and of our own individual worldviews. This book aims to reveal, listen to, and analyze narratives behind popular music.

"It's sharing your narrative. That's what it is." This phrase could also serve to explain Sarkissian's reasons for sampling. It is through sampling—the technique of musical production whereby external sound material is taken and processed in new musical compositions—that Sarkissian shares these narratives. It is through sampling that she talks about Armenian culture and history and her own role as a female electronic music producer.

In this book, I argue that analysis of the culture of sampling is one possible way to access particular narratives of this world.[1] The inclusion of external music, environmental noises, or found media material brings the world into popular music tracks in a condensed form. Timothy Taylor (2001, 139) describes sampling as providing "aural glimpses of the social." Every process of sampling represents a complex net of contexts, meanings, choices, creative decisions, and musical strategies. In-depth analysis of such processes and their socio-cultural ramifications means revealing and interpreting this net as far as possible.

To examine what a particular sampling strategy tells us about the narrative of a music producer, and thus about the world we live in, we particularly need to ask about the reasons for adopting such strategies: why has a particular sound been sampled? This task has to date rarely been undertaken by researchers. This is thus a book about reasons for sampling; about the motives, motivations, and intentions that lead to the inclusion of particular sound material in electronic music tracks. It is not a book about all sampling since, for many artists, using samples is just a banal aspect of their music-making routine. In fact, this is a book about very particular but meaningful sampling practices.

This is a book about reasons for sampling.

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1   In musicological contexts, the term "analysis" is often related to the analysis of the musical text. I do not follow such a narrow concept. Instead, I rely on H. Russell Bernard's (2011, 338) definition of analysis as "the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place." Moreover, analyses contain interpretation as a particular analytical step.

In this introduction I first want to embed my research in a historical context and to offer a very brief overview of the history of musical sampling. Second, I will comment on the relation between sampling and the political. This book focuses on electronic music tracks that contain political sampling material. I have identified at least seven dimensions on which sampling and the political clash; only two of them are covered by this book. A historical overview and a discussion of the social-political potential of sampling will then help to identify gaps in the research on sampling. Accordingly, this book focuses on the reasons behind the sampling of non-copyrighted material beyond hip hop. At the core of this book there are five in-depth anthropological, musicological, and production-oriented analyses of experimental electronic popular music tracks. Ultimately, I will close this first chapter by presenting in detail the object of study, its core interests, and its structure.

A Very Brief History of Musical Sampling

Four rough stages have so far shaped the development of sampling in popular music and the research on this production technique.[2]

Stage One: Technological Development (1970s and 1980s)

The first devices to make sampling available to music producers were developed in the 1970s. Most authors claim the Fairlight CMI (Computer Musical Instrument), arriving in 1979, as the first instrument with a built-in sampling function. Paul Harkins emphasizes that the Fairlight CMI was not the first tool allowing the reproduction of externally recorded sounds. It was, however, "not only the most commercially successful of the first digital sampling instruments; it was also the most widely used instrument for sampling" (Harkins 2016, 16).

Still, due to its high cost, the Fairlight CMI was only affordable to a few producers with high-end studios—such as Stevie Wonder, Peter Gabriel, and Kate Bush—or institutions such as broadcast companies and academic departments. This first stage of sampling was thus shaped by technical and economic developments. Later, drum computers with built-in samplers, such as the E-mu SP-12

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2   Other authors have provided more detailed historical approaches to sampling: Davies (1996) presents a general history of sampling including its precursors reaching back to the ancient empires of China and Rome. Schloss (2014 [2004]) discusses sampling in hip hop, while Morey (2013, 2017) focuses on British dance music. Finally, Harkins (2016) addresses the subject from the point of view of important technical devices.

(1985) and the Akai MPC60 (1988), were much cheaper, making the technique available to a broader range of producers. Moreover, new instruments continuously increased sampling capacity, from a half-second to one second (Fairlight CMI) up to more than thirty by the end of the decade (Harkins 2016).

In the second half of the 1980s and the early 1990s, the technique of sampling became increasingly widespread in popular music, especially in hip hop and newly emerging electronic dance music (EDM) genres such as house, techno, and drum and bass. The technique was particularly embraced in hip hop, because it allowed producers to adapt previously developed DJ techniques—cutting and repeating breaks—into new recordings. Mark Katz (2010) and Joseph Schloss (2014 [2004], 25–61) both highlight the significance of DJ practice for the understanding of sampling in hip hop.

Beyond the early breakbeats of hip hop, the academic literature discusses further precursors to sampling in music history. Among them we find versioning in dub (Sanjek 1994) and avant-garde techniques from art music (musique concrète; e.g. Davies 1997, de la Motte 1995) and beyond (cut-up by William S. Burroughs; Cutler 1994).[3] Rather than tracing a single line of development, sampling should be explained non-teleologically, with reference to multiple origins.

> *The history of sampling should be explained non-teleologically, with reference to multiple origins.*

With regards to the sampled material, at first the focus was primarily on single short sounds from instruments or the environment (such as breaking glass). As the storage capacity on sampling devices increased, longer "sound bites" became processible, such as larger melodic lines and rhythmic patterns from other records, or media material from popular culture and daily political life such as movie dialogue and political speeches (Butler 2006, 61).

Stage Two: the Golden Age of Sampling or "Sampladelic" (1986–1991)

It was toward the end of the 1980s that sampling became a celebrated production technique in popular music. In relation to hip hop, Kembrew McLeod labeled the period between 1986 and 1992 as "the golden age of sampling" (McLeod and DiCola 2011; McLeod 2015).[4] Among the outstanding sample-based hip hop productions from this period is Public Enemy's album *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990), which was made up of hundreds of "fragmentary samples" (McLeod 2005, 81; Sewell 2014b).

Sampling in EDM also flourished during this period. Between 1988 and 1991, Justin Morey (2017, 145) observed a "flowering of sampling practice in underground dance music and the mainstream."

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3 Fischer (2020, 109–43) offers a well-arranged overview on the historical development of sampling in the 20th century.

4 McLeod (2015) included the year 1992 as well. However, the lawsuit against Biz Markie's rap song "Alone Again" in 1991 can be considered a turning point in the history of sampling, as Sewell (2013) argues.

Mark Butler (2006, 61) remarked that sampling was an essential "part of track construction" at that time, referring to Simon Reynolds' (1999, 41–43) description of the period as "sampladelic."

Stage Three: Lawsuits, Restrictions, and the Decline of Sampling (1990s–ongoing)

Several high-profile lawsuits in the U.S. followed, marking the provisional end of the limitless sampling of copyrighted material (Sewell 2014a). In both the hip hop and EDM genres, observers and fans used expressions such as the "decline of sampling" (Morey 2017; Leydon 2010, 197) or, even more fatalistically, the "death of sampling" (Marshall 2006). At the turn of the millennium, Morey (2017, 205) considered the big beat genre to be "the 'last hurrah' of the sampling composer in mainstream dance music." Since this period, the practice of sampling copyrighted material has mainly been pursued by underground or niche musicians who count on being under the radar, or by music business heavyweights who can afford greater sums for copyright (sample clearance).

As Holger Lund (2015) has shown, the practice of sampling faced yet further restrictions during the 2000s. The closure of online file hosting service Megaupload and the voluntary erasure of thousands of megabytes of uploaded music on Rapidshare "meant that music bloggers [and sampling artists] lost their cyber warehouses and these warehouses' contents." With regard to Europe, the implementation of the Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market, approved by the Council of the European Union on April 15, 2019, might in future further affect the creative practices of sampling in music and beyond (Romero-Moreno 2018; Fischer 2020).

Stage Four: Ubiquitous Studio Technology and "Post-Sampling" (2000s–ongoing)

At present, it is widely recognized that these lawsuits shaped the further development of the production technique, at least regarding the processing of copyrighted material in mainstream music. However, sampling is flourishing as never before. It has become an indispensable and ubiquitous technique in the production of popular music. Behr, Negus, and Street (2017, 2) write that "sampling is no longer exceptional but, rather, embedded in commercial (and much other) popular music practice with significant consequences for the aesthetics and ethics of music making."

Sampling has become an indispensable and ubiquitous technique in the production of popular music.

Besides multitrack recording, signal processing, MIDI sequencing, and sound synthesis, popular music scholar Timothy Warner (2003, 22) considers sampling one of the "essential techniques which dominate the creative process involved in the production of pop music," while Reynolds (2011, 311) describes

sampling as an "every-day part of our listening lives." The rise of digital audio workstations (DAW)—music production software such as Live by Ableton, launched in 2001—substantially facilitated and stimulated the use of samples (Brett 2019; Ismaiel-Wendt 2016, 119–53; Fischer 2020, 143).

Only a few scholars continue to analyze the functions of sampling in this latest stage of its development. Among them, and following Wayne Marshall (2017), a tendency towards "a more atomized approach to sample-based music" can be recognized. According to Marshall, instead of "looping breakbeats or well-worn melodies," popular and obscure electronic dance music of the last decade has focused on "a set of brief sonic signifiers" (ibid.). While these samples are clearly audible and recognizable, Harkins identifies an important sampling strategy of recent decades where the opposite happens: with "microsampling," he refers to the digital reproduction of "rhythms, melodies, and voices at the micro level" (Harkins 2016, 185–86).[5] In this approach, original sampling sources remain hidden.

Others have already proclaimed the arrival of the era of "post-sampling," describing various strategies and techniques that allow artists to employ a sampling aesthetic without using samples in a recognizable way. Following Morey (2017, 295), such methods are "replays, using samples as a source of inspiration that is subsequently discarded, treating their own recordings as if they were samples, obscuring the sample, or seeking out the obscure."[6] Morey further concludes that "in a largely post-sampling musical landscape, the habit of finding ways to work with sound materials as if they *were* samples endures" (296; italics original). In his study on sampling, copyright, and creativity, Georg Fischer (2020, 307–18) labels these practices with the term "Umgehungskreativität" (workaround creativity).

Behr, Negus, and Street (2017, 2, 15), finally, describe a "'post-sampling' musical environment" as the combination of sampling and other musical practices. According to them, sampling has lost its standalone character and must be considered as a "musical field in which listening practices, creative habits and habitus are informed by and realized through a technical and musical sphere to which sampling is integral." These thoughts directly correspond with my own understanding of sampling as a multilevel creative process.

After this brief outline of the history of sampling, I will now address my own focus on the subject. To do this I will discuss two perspectives from which I can develop the scope of my research: the socio-political potential of sampling and the lack of anthropological perspectives in the academic literature.

5   See also the reworked chapter in Harkins' book on digital sampling (2020, 103–18).
6   Marshall (2006) describes a similar strategy by discussing the sample-free but sample-shaped sound aesthetics of the beats by hip hop band The Roots.

The Socio-Political Potential of Sampling

In approaching narratives behind sample-based music, I focus in this book on political sampling material or political strategies. I conceive of "the political" as a signifier of the social. In search of significant stories and traceable intentions and motivations, I was looking for tracks in electronic popular music whose sample material contains (layers of) meaning, pointing beyond a merely musical or personal level. In other words: I was interested in sampling material (or sampling processes) with significance and relevance for a broader part of society.

An extended definition of the concept of "the political" follows in Chapter 2.

Meanwhile, these areas—sampling and the political—potentially clash in many ways. I have identified at least seven dimensions to this clash. In combination, they illustrate the socio-political potential of sampling. To strengthen these perspectives, I have elsewhere published a collection of short essays (Liechti, Burkhalter, and Rhensius 2020) which provides examples for most of these categories. Some of these articles are thus presented briefly below, among other references from the academic literature on sampling.[7]

(a) Sampling Political Material

The processing of political material is a common strategy in popular music. Especially in hip hop, samples from black political leaders and activists such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and Stokely Carmichael became "commonplaces," as Russell A. Potter asserts (1995, 43). Beyond hip hop, early examples include the avant-garde synth-pop group Art of Noise, who sampled a political speech in their 1984 track "A Time for Fear (Who's Afraid)" (Warner 2003, 99), and Paul Hardcastle's 1985 synth-pop track "19," which used samples from a documentary about the Vietnam war (Morey 2017, 124).

The case studies on M.E.S.H.'s track "Methy Imbiß" (Chapter 10) and Eomac's "Perversas" (9) particularly deal with this category.

The processing of political material is a common strategy in popular music.

In EDM, the practice encompasses—among uncountable others—The Orb's "Little Fluffy Clouds" from 1990, with its sampling of World War II airplane sounds (160–63; Holm-Hudson 1997), as well as Matthew Herbert's highly conceptual sampling art, which processes war sounds such as bullets and bombs (DJ Empty and the 2013 EP *The End of Silence*), or captures the destruction of products from multinational enterprises (as Radio Boy).[8] In her brief survey of the sampling of political speech across dance music, Lora Baraldi (2020) looks for strategies that go beyond the well-known modes

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7 This subchapter was previously published in Liechti 2020. This edited collection of short essays offers further examples of sampling strategies within the seven dimensions presented here.
8 The political sampling strategies of Matthew Herbert are further discussed by Velasco-Pufleau (2020), Burkhalter (2015a), Harkins (2013b; 2016, 229, 240–47) and Großmann (2005).

of social commentary and denunciation, often taking the shape of danceable satire. Just as this book does, Baraldi examines the aims, motivations, and intentions behind particular sampling strategies. This dimension further includes the processing of police sirens and gunshots, a practice popular in various fields, from hip hop and dancehall to recent experimental electronica (Amobi 2015).

(b) Sampling with Political Intent

Even if sampling material is not political as such, it can be used in combination with intentions or concepts that are <u>political in nature</u>. Prominent examples include John Oswald's *Plunderphonics* (1988) and Den Sorte Skole's *Lektion III* (2013).[9] Both projects combine a broad range of samples from external musical recordings—samples that are not explicitly political—to "challenge the existing laws and the music business" (Den Sorte Skole cited in Lund 2015). They can be conceived of as musical protest against copyright norms.

Again, Matthew Herbert's highly conceptual sample art serves as an example here, for instance when he processes sounds from a pig's life (*One Pig*) to criticize the globalized food industry.[8] Another example is mentioned by Morey (2017, 212): in the track "Power to the Beats," the electronic group Utah Saints sample testimonies from Metallica and Chuck D given before U.S. Congress as part of the debate around the filesharing platform Napster. Producer Jez Willis remembered that this "was a statement for me (but again, no one got the reference!)" (ibid.). This example is a first indication that political sampling strategies do not need to be obvious to the listener.

Political intentions behind sampling processes are discussed in the case studies of COOL FOR YOU's "STABILIZED YES!" (Chapter 6), Lara Sarkissian's "kenats" (7), and Moro's "Libres" (8).

Political sampling strategies do not need to be obvious to the listener.

(c) Sampling in Conflict with the Law

A third category collects sampling strategies that neither process political material nor are linked with a political intention per se. Instead, they are in conflict with the law because they process copyrighted samples without clearing the rights. There are countless examples of this political dimension of sampling: one could for instance look at the German lawsuit between electro pioneers Kraftwerk and the hip hop producer Moses Pelham, who used a two-second sample from a Kraftwerk track in one of his productions (Ismaiel-Wendt 2016, 171–84; Fischer 2020, 13–19).

The academic literature has broadly covered this area. The ramifications of such laws regarding musical practice have, for example, been raised by Michel Brasil, who portrays the sampling practice of underground beatmakers in the local hip hop scene of Belo Horizonte, Brazil. He shows that the decision to use the technique

9   For further discussion on John Oswald's *Plunderphonics* see Cutler (1994), Holm-Hudson (1997), and Weber (2004).

of sample chopping is both economic and political, since producers are forced to chop samples due to copyright issues (Brasil 2020). This is yet another example of the aforementioned "workaround creativity" in sampling (Fischer 2020, 307–18).

This book does not cover this category. The following three political dimensions of sampling will also not be amplified further. This is because they are defined from the perspective of reception. As explained below, this study mainly focuses on the perspective of musical production.

(d) The Problematization of Sampling Strategies

The processing of external sound material has always stoked (and continues to stoke) controversy among scholars, journalists, and fans. In most cases, they criticize an imbalance of power between the sampling artists and the authors of the sampled sources. In research, the processing of ethnographic sound recordings in particular is criticized by many authors such as Timothy Taylor (2003, 73).[10] He observes that "one of the ways Westerners appropriate other music is to construct the original makers of that appropriated music as anonymous."

Taylor brings up the case of the new age band Enigma, who sampled a song by the Taiwanese musicians Difang and Igay Duana without permission or credit in their hit single "Return to Innocence" (1994). Similarly, Susanne Binas-Preisendörfer (2004, 2010) discusses the song "Sweet Lullaby" (1992) by new age group Deep Forest, which is based on a Melanesian lullaby from the Solomon Islands.

In EDM, sampling practices are also regularly criticized as exoticizing or as cultural appropriation. DJ and label owner Simian Keiser (2016), for example, criticizes the exoticizing tendencies in club culture's sampling of African music, the so-called "outernational sound"—exemplified by Four Tet's 2013 track "The Track I've Been Playing That People Keep Asking About And That Joy Used In His RA Mix And Daphni Played On Boiler Room."[11]

The processing of external sound material has always stoked (and continues to stoke) controversy among scholars, journalists, and fans.

10   See Binas (2004, 2010), Feld (2000), Hesmondhalgh (2000, 2006), Stokes (2004), Taylor (2001, 2003, 2012), or Théberge (2003).

11   Similar cases have been analyzed by Chris McGuinness (2020), Luigi Monteanni (2020), and the Laura Collective (2020). McGuinness explores the story of Punjabi singer Sohan Lal, whose voice ended up on a globally distributed compilation containing a sample library of South Asian sounds. From there his voice found its way into mainstream electronic dance music productions, as did samples of Indonesian car horns called "om telolet om." Monteanni analyzes this phenomenon as part of a local youth culture. He problematizes the global use of these samples in between the benefits of recognition and the discriminatory structures of Orientalism. Using samples, Monteanni argues, is far from a harmless practice. Finally, the Laura Collective asks to what extent sampling practices maintain or disrupt an exoticized ideal of indigenous populations. The Brazilian research collective compares the example of a worldwide EDM artist who repeats the clichés of exoticizing cultural appropriation through sampling, with an indigenous rap group who use cultural sampling "to occupy the Western visibility regime as a way to express and make their own narratives heard."

(e) Provoking Conflict

In the previously discussed dimension, sampling is political because sampling practices become problematic through reflecting established power relations. This fifth dimension now categorizes direct provocations through the use of particular sound material. The British techno DJ Dax J was sentenced to one year in jail after playing a track that sampled a Muslim call to prayer in a live set at a nightclub in Tunisia in spring 2017. Dax J had to immediately flee the country to avoid arrest. On social media, he later apologized for the incident, mentioning that "it was never my intention to upset or cause offence to anybody" (O'Connor 2017).

This case is also discussed by Liam Maloney (2020). He considers sampling "a microcosm for political and ideological disparities across the globe" and argues that sampling has become a "politically charged act, trapped between secularism and theocracy." Despite its unifying history, he says, sampling has become "a divisive process."

(f) Sampling in Politicized Contexts

Another encounter between sampling and the political occurs when a non-political sample, or sample-based music devoid of political intentions, is played in a politicized context. One striking example would be the use of sample-based music as propaganda or within a political campaign. The meaning(s) of the sampled materials might change considerably in such contexts. While I cannot offer concrete examples here, it should be evident that such situations could potentially occur.

Another fitting example, discussed by Mattia Zanotti (2020) and Nico Mangifesta (2019), is *Stregoni*, an Italian music project working with asylum seekers and refugees. The project draws on participants' smartphones as individual sample libraries for improvisation and the realizing of performances. Sampling, in this case, facilitates an attitude of community, and Zanotti asks whether the production method can even help to represent and recreate identity. This practice of sample-based music is political not least because it brings together refugees and native Italians and because it relies on the smartphone, a symbol "mentioned with grievance by those who line up against immigration" and, on the other hand, a "strongbox that preserves identity" for the refugees (Zanotti 2020).

(g) Sampling as a Political Act

A final perspective considers sampling on a meta level. It regards sampling as a cultural technique, containing processes of selecting and combining creative material. This technique could be considered political as such. Three articles from my publication on political

sampling explain this dimension.

Marcel Zaes (2020) examines what he calls the "textural sampling" of Japanese electronic artist Kyoka. He finds its political quality in the producer's blurring of the lines between sample-based club music and synthesis-oriented experimental music by "destroying out-of-context materials, stripping them of their meaning, [and] rendering them extremely dense collages." In doing so, sampling challenges listener expectations and value sets attached to the experimental or popular music markets. In Kyoka's so-called "techno punk," Zaes sees the "subtle resistance of a conscious, self-designated outsider."

Vinícius Fernandes (2020) analyzes the cut-up technique, one of sampling's predecessors, developed by writer William S. Burroughs in the 1960s. "The reallocation and deformation of signs" enacted through cut-up "produces a suspension of normal expected coherence" between these signs and the underlying medium. Fernandes understands sampling techniques as a "powerful weapon" and a political tool, helping to produce a "political conscience" by suspending "semiotic normality" and thus "uncovering the subjects operating perversely behind" particular signs. Fernandes argues that the cut-up method can be read as a premonition of 21st century phenomena like the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal.

Lastly, remix researcher Eduardo Navas (2020) reflects on how automated and self-training forms of production are reshaping creative possibilities in music and culture. His take on the politics of sampling in the age of machine learning invites us to extend into the future our thoughts on the interplay of sampling and politics today.

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The above categorization is neither exhaustive nor systematic. A further study that pays particular attention to political sampling could further verify and enlarge these categories. In the present book, I will primarily discuss the first two dimensions: the sampling of political material (a) and sampling with a political intention (b).

I have so far presented an overview of existing research on sampling from two angles. The first chronologically traced the development of the production technique since its early days in the 1970s, while the second focused on the political dimensions of sampling. Two further perspectives will be pursued later: in Chapter 2 I will contrast various definitions of the term, and in Chapter 3 I will systematically discuss typological attempts to describe the processing of samples. Although there is, as we have seen and will see, considerable output on the phenomenon of sampling in (academic) literature, there are still substantial gaps that need to be addressed.

Gaps in Sampling Research

Sampling studies have so far been largely centered on questions of copyright, authorship, originality, and creativity. This is no surprise: legal issues are key when one examines the political dimensions of sampling. However, Harkins (2010a, 2) rightly assumes that this interest might "overemphasize the role of the law in making musical decisions." A second focal point of sampling studies has been the genre of (U.S.) hip hop. It was only in recent years that a larger number of studies started to focus on genres associated with EDM. Today, there are around twice as many available studies on sampling with a focus on hip hop than there are on EDM. Beyond both fields, sampling is even less analyzed. As a result, we do not know much about the differences in sampling practices between various genres.

Schloss (2014 [2004], 146) has further argued that "symbolic meaning (as opposed to pragmatic value within the musical system) is almost universally overstated by scholars as a motive for sampling." In his critique, the ethnomusicologist refers to the predominant conception of sampling as a referential or intertextual practice. Joanna Demers (2010, 52) seconds this view and observes an overestimation of quotations as "intentionally included."

This book is, on the one hand, yet another study with a strong emphasis on the generation of meaning and the analysis of intertextual relations. On the other hand, however, I develop an approach that allows us to carefully differentiate between a broad range of motives and intentions behind sampling processes.

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Another gap concerns the lack of in-depth analyses of musical examples. There are only a few studies that substantially analyze individual tracks of sample-based music.[12] In most studies, tracks are instead addressed through short references to underline a particular argument. It is surprising that one of the main objects of popular music remains largely absent. Even if tracks or songs are thoroughly analyzed, such as in the anthology *Song Interpretation*, there is no example with a considerable emphasis on the processing of sampling material (von Appen et al. 2015). To pave the way towards filling this gap, I will analyze sampling strategies from the perspective of individual tracks, and I will further investigate the development of appropriate analytical tools for sample-based music—which, owing to the aforementioned gaps in the academic literature, remain absent. Furthermore, existing track analyses rarely

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12   The following authors invest certain efforts in the analysis of individual tracks. This is a small number relative to the overall number of studies on sampling: Binas (2004, 2010), Bonz (2008), Brøvig-Hanssen (2010), Elflein (2010), Di Fede (2014), Hein (2016), Holm-Hudson (1997), Ismaiel-Wendt (2011), Metzer (2003), Miyakawa (2005), Taylor (2003), and Williams (2015).

combine methods from cultural anthropology and musicology. As I will illustrate here, this combination can help us to reach in-depth descriptions of musical phenomena.

Finally, regarding the analyzed sampling sources, the overwhelming number of studies focus on the sampling of previously recorded, officially released, and thus copyrighted music. Hence, this study will focus on understudied sampling material such as found footage, environmental noises, media material, and other either unreleased or not officially released music.

This study will focus on understudied sampling material such as found footage, environmental noises, media material, and other either unreleased or not officially released music.

These gaps in the research on sampling illustrate the need for a closer focus on aspects of production, a call that was already made in 2003 by Tara Rodgers (2003, 313), who recognized that the "musical and political goals" of sampling artists have not been adequately explored.[13] Rodgers proposed a set of questions that should be addressed by further studies. She asked, for example, "How do electronic musicians use the 'automated' mechanisms of digital instruments to achieve nuanced musical expression and cultural commentary?" (ibid.).

In the following years, Rodgers' call was answered. Many subsequent studies refer to her demand and state that sampling must be conceived of as a result of conscious creative decisions and as a part of the compositional process. However, the actual in-depth analysis of these chains of decisions, and an analysis of the perspective of the artists involved, remains an unfinished task. This might be due to the considerable methodological challenges such an endeavor entails.

Perhaps the first scholar to focus considerably on the perspective of sampling artists was Joseph Schloss. In his seminal study on the practices and ethics of American hip hop producers (2014 [2004]) he identified a set of ethical and practical rules guiding the compositional process of hip hop beat makers. Based on anthropological fieldwork, he also addressed how particular beats are made and the reasons behind creative decisions within the sampling process.

After Schloss, it is only in recent years that scholars have continued to fill this research gap. In his dissertation, Harkins (2016, 2020) described the sampler "as a compositional tool," focusing on the history of sampling from the perspective of the technical devices deployed. He showed that the use of music technologies is shaped by an "interpretative flexibility." This means that the practices of the users of sampling devices were not congruent with the purposes these devices were originally designed for.

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13   Rodgers was not the first to call for an intensified study of the perspectives of artists and other actors involved. Before her, Hesmondhalgh (2000, 281) and Taylor (2001) made similar appeals.

In another dissertation, Justin Morey (2017) studied sampling practices in British dance music between 1987 and 2012 with a close focus on concepts of creativity and creative practice. He examined the pathways of individual sampling artists and traced how they became successful. He further analyzed the ramifications of copyright law on the sampling practices under analysis. In his history of sampling in EDM-associated genres in the U.K., Morey primarily focused on *what* has been sampled and *how* producers processed their material, without much stress on the "why."[14]

By focusing on the production- and artist-related aspects of sample-based music, this book aims to close some of the aforementioned gaps. This study does, however, focus more on the *culture* of musical production than on musical production itself. Moving beyond issues of copyright and the genre of hip hop, this book takes a track-oriented approach by analyzing five particular sampling strategies. The triangulation of methods—between musical analysis and anthropological fieldwork—will offer new and in-depth perspectives on the artistic application of the producing method in question. Concerning what Rodgers (2003, 313) refers to as the "musical and political goals" of sampling artists, there is still a lot of work to do through research in the field of sampling studies.

I now want to further clarify the object of study and my core interests. This will be followed by a short excursus on the challenges and opportunities related to focusing on the issue of intention—in other words, why should we analyze the "why"?

Object of Study and Focus

In search of the narratives behind popular music, this study focuses on the key medium of electronic popular music in the digital culture of the 21st century: the track. The track is *the* format through which electronic popular music is widely distributed. Tracks circulate online and are accessed through platforms such as SoundCloud and Bandcamp. In clubs, we dance while listening to tracks played by a DJ. Tracks are joined together in DJ mixes, playlists on streaming services, and radio sets. Most of the time, artists start releasing individual tracks before presenting their first EPs or LPs—be they digital or physical. Often, tracks are the first channel through which artists try to reach a greater and global audience.

The analyzed tracks in this book all belong to what I call the

14 There are two further smaller scale studies that take a production-related perspective. Puig (2017, 2020) examined the strategies of a Palestinian hip hop musician living on the edge of a refugee camp in Lebanon. Although using anthropological methods, Puig's analyses do not go beyond mere description of the processed material. In a paper more oriented towards philosophy, Chapman (2011) discussed Walter Benjamin's concept of the "aura" and his practice of quotation. He based his thoughts regarding the creative process of sampling on interviews with sampling artists in Montréal, Canada.

field of experimental electronica. This field allows for a fruitful analysis of sampling strategies. Experimental electronica tracks are predominantly instrumental and, in place of lyrics, it is the task of samples to connect them with extra-musical content. These tracks represent 21st century music: they are hybrid, digital, and globally connected. The sound is abrasive, ambivalent, and apocalyptic. These tracks regularly discuss socio-political issues such as gender, queer identity, racism, and colonialism. As I will show, this field allows for an in-depth analysis of sampling strategies and gives access to narratives of present-day music making.

However, as mentioned previously, this book does not focus on all forms of sampling, instead highlighting sampling strategies that have not been addressed to a great extent by previous research. Accordingly, I will not analyze the sampling of music that has been officially released. This can be conceived as the "classical" sampling method, and is already well documented—no surprise considering the academic literature's fixation on issues of copyright. Moreover, I do not examine the processing of single notes from musical instruments, nor the sampling of domestic musical material that has been generated for previous musical projects. Hence, this book focuses on the sampling of *external sound material*.

Moreover, I focus on political sampling strategies. In terms of the dimensions of political sampling presented above, this study highlights the first two: the sampling of sound material that could be conceived as political, and the sampling of "neutral" or non-contextual sound material with an intention that could be characterized as political. This emphasis allows us to access the complex narratives and traceable intentions behind the analyzed tracks. In other words: no one samples a heavily political sound such as the explosion of a bomb in a military conflict without a clear motive and intention. Moreover, there is a good chance that these intentions are still traceable even after the process of production has ended.

Finally, there are two more constraints on the object of study. First, I have only analyzed tracks released between 2015 and 2017. This constraint has substantially facilitated access to the circumstances of production: the more time that has elapsed since the production of a track, the more confused a producer's memories may become. Second, I have focused on the production stage only; I do not analyze processes of reception. This is not to say that a study of reception is not important. On the contrary: for a holistic analysis of a musical phenomenon, a perspective on reception is essential. Based on the thinking of semiologist Jean Molino, Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990) has theorized this view in his understanding of the poietic (creation/production), neutral, and esthesic (reception) dimensions of analysis. However, broadening our focus to encompass processes of reception would go beyond the scope of this book.

These tracks represent 21st century music: they are hybrid, digital, and globally connected.

In summary, this book examines the culture of sampling in experimental electronica. The basic goal of this study is to shed light on the techniques (how) and reasons (why) behind processes of sampling in experimental electronica. On the basis of the case studies, I want to illustrate how political sampling material is processed in experimental electronica, and how seemingly "neutral" or non-contextual sampling material is politicized. I am particularly interested in analyzing the strategies behind these tracks: what attitudes, intentions, motives, and motivations are decisive?

A few core interests led the present research, separated into a first set of general (1–3) and a second set of more specific (4–6) issues. This study seeks to

(1) **shed light on the understudied field of the culture of musical production.** How is music produced? What kind of choices, decisions, and musical strategies shape the creative process?

(2) **unlock narratives.** The research seeks to reveal what I call the "seismographic substance" behind popular music: what can we learn about the world when we study popular music? The insights gained through this approach reveal some of the complexities of the world we live in. Andreas Wittel (2000) has argued that "ethnography is about revealing context and thus complexity." As a consequence, this study does not invest in the question of how popular music *changes* the world, which would be another highly important question.

(3) **enhance the understanding of sampling.** At a time when sampling has become a ubiquitous studio technique, and the academic literature has predominantly focused on questions of copyright and authorship, this study wants to show further nuances in the culture of sampling and its heterogeneous functionalities and modes of application.

(4) **identify a range of strategies behind the appropriation and processing of pre-existing sonic material.** This range reaches from the hidden processing of sampling material on one end to obvious sampling on the other. This includes, in particular, an examination of the reasons for sampling. Hence, this qualitative study identifies neither a single strategy preferred by producers in the field, nor a set of strategies that can be considered as representative. The range presented here illustrates five potential sampling strategies in experimental electronica and could serve as an orientation grid for further studies, which could add other strategies within or even exceeding this range.

The last two core interests can be conceived of as methodological "side effects"—albeit significant ones—of this study.

(5) The first is to offer an overview of the various typological at-

I want to illustrate how political sampling material is processed in experimental electronica, and how seemingly "neutral" or non-contextual sampling material is politicized.

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tempts undertaken by other scholars to classify the parameters of sampling. This overview will help to identify further gaps in the research and to develop two new tools for the analysis of sampling processes.

(**6**) As a consequence, this study also becomes a methodological investigation of the analysis of sample-based popular music. It finally makes a suggestion as to how processes of sampling could be fruitfully analyzed with a close focus on popular music tracks.

In each case study, the research question is divided into further sub-questions. A brief overview of the key conclusions from the five case studies gives a further impression of what the reader can expect in the following pages. Thus, amongst others, the case studies will reveal

– how specific <u>subcultural identities and lived experiences</u> are articulated or reflected through processes of sampling.

→ Case studies of Vika Kirchenbauer, Lara Sarkissian, Mauro Guz Bejar

– how sampling is used as <u>a tool for the communication of political ideas</u>, concepts, and thoughts.

→ Kirchenbauer, Guz Bejar

– how processes of sampling reflect <u>habits of media consumption</u> and how important these media are for the production of music.

→ Sarkissian, Ian McDonnell, James Whipple

– how <u>hidden processes of sampling</u> are meaningful both for the producer and the musical product.

→ Whipple, McDonnell

This study will deploy qualitative research methods. By examining the previously outlined core interests, I will combine methods ranging from musical analysis to anthropological fieldwork (semi-structured interviews and direct observation) and the method of case studies.

I want to make one more remark before closing this introduction. As core interest (4) illustrates, this study also highlights a highly delicate issue: that of intention. This issue might provoke further methodological and epistemological questions.

Excursus: The Problem of Intention

Maria Alvarez wrote that "questions that ask for reasons, and in particular, reasons for action, are among the commonest questions humans have" (Alvarez 2016). Related to sampling, it was Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt (2011a, 50) who emphasized the importance of this endeavor. He said that we need to ask why a particular reference is presented in popular music, and what experience the popular music track transmits through it. However, despite this claim, research has not much concerned itself with this question with regard to the

production of popular music.[15]

This may be related to the considerable analytical and methodological challenges this focus presents: is there such a thing as an original intention? How can we identify reliable motives and intentions? How can we identify something as *the* intention behind a particular action (see also Aristotle on causality)? While keeping these critical questions in mind, let me first justify why I consider it important to care about sampling motivations at all.

First and foremost, I'm interested in knowing what people are doing and *why* they are doing it. Translating these foci to music, I want to know why something sounds the way it does and what went into its creation. Again, these questions do not tell us much about how the world is affected or even changed, but they do tell us something about the world as it exists, and about humanity. Questions like these are at the core of the anthropological endeavor itself.

Second, the understanding of authorial positions can lead to more informed debates around controversial issues. How can we, for example, effectively discuss the accusation of cultural appropriation regarding the processing of certain samples, or understand satire and irony as stylistic devices, without knowing anything about the potential intentions behind an artistic object? Certainly, such debates always need to consider positions of reception too, but they should not be restricted to them. I am convinced that by knowing more about authorial intentions we can contribute to these controversial debates more precisely. In summary, knowing and discussing the artistic positions behind processes of sampling is one step on the way towards a thorough and in-depth examination of musical phenomena. Finally, this leads to a "more informed listening experience," as Robert Ratcliffe (2014, 98) claims.

Of course, we must always be careful not to take the position of authors as absolute. Most of all because we cannot "access the intentions of musicians" but only "their reports of those intentions" as Allan Moore (2012, 208) thoughtfully notes. Secondly, because reception will always add its own, and often contradictory, readings. Roland Barthes' (1977) dictum of the "death of the author" perhaps signaled the death knell for authorship's elevated position.[16] In this regard, Richard Dyer also points to the problematic aspects of the concept of "intention":

> *I want to know* why something sounds the way it does and what went into its creation.

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15   Only a few researchers show interest in an investigation into authorial intention in processes of sampling. Chapman (2011) and Déon (2011), for example, emphasize sampling as a result of considerable artistic choices. In the broader field of music studies, musicologist Leigh Landy (2007, ix) concludes that "a tendency in the artistic scholarship of the latter half of the twentieth century concerns the step away from the study of an artwork's construction and, where articulated, an art maker's intention toward the experience of the recipient."

16   Although it should be said that Barthes' essay does not state that there is no longer any authorial intention or that it is of no importance. Instead, Barthes points to the fact that there is no "original" or "fixed meaning" and thus meaning is primarily created by the reader.

Intention is a notion that has made cultural theorists twitchy for at least a century. Intention acquired a bad name because it was often used in a strong sense, to refer to the biography or inner life of the artist, in ways that both are hard to prove and privilege such intention over what the art seems manifestly to be. However, we do not need to throw out all notions of intention just because of such problems. (Dyer 2007, 2)

To avoid getting caught in the trap of speculation (how can we know about authorial intentions?), this study is broadly based on anthropological research. In artist interviews I tried to fathom the reasons for the processing of particular sampling material as far as possible. I then tried to verify the acquired information whenever possible through other channels. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the focus on political sampling material significantly raised the chances of accessing definable intentions. Finally, perhaps the most important point to make here is that my analysis of reasons for sampling always considers multiple motives and intentions. Thus, I analyze them as a complex entity of various reasons, motives, motivations, and intentions instead of identifying singular, exclusive intentions.

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Let me return to the beginning of this introduction: "It's sharing your narrative. That's what it is." This is one of several motives behind the sampling practice of electronic music producer Lara Sarkissian. However, as I should have made clear in this introduction, on my way to an in-depth analysis of sampling processes, I will not only concern myself with the obvious strategies: the ones by which someone is intending to *share* something. Hence, this book wants to present a broad range of artistic expressions. To understand these expressions, we need to take the intentions behind them seriously and listen to these narratives. This book is a step in this direction.

Structure and Case Studies

This book could be approached in two ways. Readers who are interested in concrete analyses of popular music should start directly with the case studies. Readers who are interested in how I approached these analyses, in a more general discussion of the analysis of sample-based music, or in an examination of reasons for sampling in experimental electronica should continue on after this introduction. However, no matter how you decide to read it, each part of the book makes reference to the other parts, allowing you to jump back and forth as you see fit. The glossary explains key terms and concepts in a condensed form.

In Chapter 2 I will introduce and clarify the terms and concepts most important to this study. Starting with an extensive definition of "sampling" from three angles (field-based, literature-oriented, and personal), I will continue by discussing "the political" and the two cultural concepts of "meaning" and "material." Another concern of this chapter will be the description and characterization of the field of research, experimental electronica, and a short definition of my understanding of "popular music." The second part of this chapter is dedicated to a discussion of my methodological approach, including a suggestion for a new field of study, trackology, focusing on the analysis of tracks.

Chapter 3 once again discusses the academic literature on sampling. Here I assemble a broad range of typological attempts so far made by scholars to describe various parameters of the sampling process. In doing so, I will identify crucial gaps in the research, including the little-studied focus on questions of the "why."

Chapters 4 and 5 will introduce and develop two analytical tools: the fader of visibility (FOV) and the spider of sampling reasons (SSR). These tools are based on the preceding discussion of the literature alongside data from my own anthropological research. Both tools aim to facilitate the analysis of sample-based music, and will be applied in the case studies which follow. Chapter 5 also addresses, on a broader level, the question of why artists sample in experimental electronica.

Chapters 6 to 10 form the core of this book. These chapters offer detailed analyses of five sampling strategies by laptop producers of experimental electronica. Each analysis aims to deliver a detailed description of the respective sampling process and a thorough discussion of the sampling reasons involved.

In the interlude, I approach the core interests of this book from yet another angle. Having analyzed the sampling processes of released tracks, I here focus on a direct observation of a musical production in the making. This will offer further insights into the creative choices of a particular sampling process and allow a well-grounded discussion of sampling as a multilevel process, as I have defined the term before.

To close this book, I will finally present a few conclusions and an outlook in Chapter 12. I will compare the case studies, illustrate the range of the sampling strategies examined, and offer some concluding perspectives on sampling in experimental electronica. I will discuss sampling as a substitute for the voice, as a deeply personal project, and as a digital experience that is shaped and influenced by media. In the second part of the chapter I will look beyond this study, summarizing its value for a multi-perspective ethnography of sampling.

Although the case studies will be analyzed at length in Chapters 6 to 10, I will refer to them in other parts of the book wherever

appropriate. As such, it is useful to first offer a short introduction to the five analyzed tracks and their producers. For a more detailed introduction, see the respective case study chapters. All tracks can be accessed via online platforms (SoundCloud and/or Bandcamp). Note that throughout the book, artists presented in the case studies are referred to by their full names rather than their pseudonyms to illustrate my relative closeness to them during my research. Further artists not represented in a case study, with whom I had more superficial contact, are referred to by their pseudonyms.

COOL FOR YOU: "STABILIZED, YES!" (2017)

The brain behind the project COOL FOR YOU is German interdisciplinary artist Vika Kirchenbauer (*1983), based in Berlin. Kirchenbauer has so far released two EPs: *GIVEN YOUR CONVENIENT ABSENCE* (2016, self-released) and *MOOD MANAGEMENT* (2017 on Creamcake). In spring 2019, she released her debut album *COMMUNAL MESS* on Creamcake. On all three releases she exclusively processes material from the Northern American Sacred Harp tradition, a religious choral tradition stemming from a colonial context. The track "STABILIZED, YES!" comes from her second EP and had received 2,800 plays on SoundCloud by June 2019 (Creamcake 2017b).[17]

Lara Sarkissian: "kenats" (2016)

Lara Sarkissian (*1992) is an electronic music producer based in Oakland, California. She further acts as a DJ (DJ FOOZOOL), filmmaker, party organizer, and label owner (Club Chai). Sarkissian is of Armenian descent, and grew up as part of an Armenian diaspora community. This Armenian heritage is a strong influence on her compositional practice, including her sampling strategies. "kenats" was one of her first published tracks. Released in January 2016, the track had reached 3,512 plays on SoundCloud by July 2021 (Sarkissian 2016). Sarkissian released her debut EP *DISRUPTION* on her own label in 2018. In the same year, she contributed to the Hexadome project from the Berlin-based Institute for Sound and Music (ISM), at the invitation of research platform Norient. In this context she undertook a four-week artist's residency at the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany, where I had the chance to observe her production process.

The author of this book is also part of Norient. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the author's involvement.

Moro: "Libres" (2016)

The next case study focuses on a track by Argentinian producer Mauro Guz Bejar (*1993). To date, Guz Bejar has released two EPs: his first, *San Benito*, through NON Worldwide in 2016, and his second, *Irrelevant*, through Janus in 2018. In 2016, Bejar moved from

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17 The display of the plays was disabled after June 2019.

Buenos Aires to Berlin. In his track "Libres," from his first EP (NON Worldwide 2016), he sampled a sound of a chain from an online database. No statistics on clicks or plays are accessible for this track.

Eomac: "Perversas" (2017)

Eomac is the pseudonym of Irish-born electronic music producer and DJ Ian McDonnell (*1979). Since 2010, he has released a range of singles, EPs, and albums on various labels, including his own Eotrax. McDonnell is part of other projects, such as the duos Lakker and noeverything, and the solo project EeOo. In 2014, he moved from Dublin, Ireland, to Berlin. On his track "Perversas" (Candela Rising 2017), he sampled a clip from a documentary on people who maintain sexual relations with animals (the practice of bestiality). The track was released as part of the compilation *Elephant Road* (2017 on Candela Rising). No statistics on clicks or plays of the official track are accessible. A non-official YouTube upload had reached 1,177 views as of July 2021.

M.E.S.H.: "Methy Imbiβ" (2015)

M.E.S.H. is the artist James Whipple (*1985), who was born, grew up, and was educated in various places in the U.S. before moving to Berlin in 2009. There, he co-founded the Janus collective, which organizes club nights and releases electronic music. Since 2011, he has released singles, EPs, and DJ Mixes on various labels, though mostly on PAN records. Whipple published his first album *Piteous Gate* in 2015 and his second album *Hesaitix* in 2017. The track "Methy Imbiβ" (PAN Records 2015) forms part of his first full-length album and contains a hidden sample of war sounds from the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. Unofficial uploads on SoundCloud and YouTube reached 4,121 plays and 7,135 views as of July 2021.

Having introduced the production method of sampling, the focus of the present study, and the tracks and producers examined in the case studies, I will now continue by defining the terms and concepts most important to this book, introducing the field, and explaining my methodological approach.