The Spider of Sampling Reasons (SSR)

A flexible coordinate system that helps to display and to discuss complex combinations of reasons behind processes of sampling.

Figure 5.1: The spider of sampling reasons SSR

1 This display format has been developed on the basis of smartspider diagrams, which are used for personal profiles displaying the political attitudes of nominees for democratic elections. The diagram has been kindly provided by smartvote Switzerland (www.smartvote.ch).
The spider of sampling reasons (SSR) deals with motivations, motives, and intentions behind processes of sampling. In research on sampling this aspect has often been neglected, or has not been analyzed in an expansible manner. With the SSR, I thus aim to provide a flexible coordinate system that helps to display and to discuss complex combinations of reasons behind processes of sampling.

The SSR organizes reasons for sampling into four main approaches: contextual, material, accidental, and procedural. The first of these approaches is further subdivided into various perspectives. It is not the aim of the tool to identify any single or “original” reason—I do not believe such a thing exists—but to display a range of additive reasons that seem more likely in a given sampling process. It is always a mixture of reasons that determines the delicate decision-making behind the selection of particular samples. The model is displayed in a circle in order to avoid a default prioritization of certain categories over others.

I have developed the SSR based on the answers my interviewees gave to one of the central research questions of this study: why do producers of experimental electronica sample political material, or use the production technique of sampling to speak about political subjects? The categories have been tested and refined in analysis of the case studies. Accordingly, reasons for sampling that occurred more often among my interviewees are emphasized more strongly than others. The contextual approach was elaborated on in the most detail, since the sampling of political sounds almost always relies to a great extent on contextual reasons. Hence, when addressing a different research question or field of research, one would need to revise and expand the model.

However, the basic structure of the SSR—the four approaches at the first level—could potentially be useful for the analysis of a broader range of sample-based music. I have verified these categories by comparing data from the academic literature and from interviews conducted in the first stage of my research, where I had not yet defined the final focus of this study. To continue, I will now

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2 These terms are all used to describe human action, but they relate to slightly different concepts. An intention is closely related to a particular action and represents the actor’s concrete aim behind this action. Kieran Setiya (2018) describes this form of intention as the intention with which someone acts. In contrast, motive and motivation can be regarded as more general and abstract reasons for actions. A motive represents “that state of mind which makes a particular result attractive enough to the agent for him to effect it,” or it “is a propensity to act one way rather than another in situations of particular sort” (Hoffman 1984, 389). Motivation is often understood “in the sense of what produces the desire” to perform some act (Scheer 2001, 400). I finally use the term “reason” as an umbrella term, also including reasons that are neither intentions nor motives or motivations. Moreover, it is often challenging to define to which of these concepts a reason can be ascribed—concrete intentions aside. Hence, I use the terms motivations and motives on a general level, related to reasons with no concrete aim behind them.

3 In a short ethnography of a sampling process, Jochen Bonz (2008, 108–10) illustrates the difficulties (or probably even the impossibility) of clearly ascribing sampling practices to one or another approach, for example either to the contextual or the material.
describe how I deduced the four main approaches, before making a few general remarks on the functionality of the model and its mode of display. Finally, I will discuss each approach, illustrated by interview data.

**The Four General Approaches of the SSR**

When asked about their reasons for sampling, producers mostly described two distinct approaches. The first is an aesthetic approach, where a sound is selected for its aesthetic nature, and the second is a referential approach, where (extra-musical) meaning determines the selection. This distinction appeared throughout my interviews to differing degrees, and was explained with differing vocabulary. It has informed the first two approaches in my model: the contextual and the material. One musician who developed a similar categorization was electronic industrial artist Pyl:

*Why do you sample sounds when the source seems not to be important?*

*I need certain sounds in their entirety, overlaying with other sounds and/or effects. I don’t want a specific song.*

*What I want to have is a specific guitar or a specific drum in my own song. And this specific sound is always shaped by a specific production process. So, you can say that I’m not really sampling the musicians, I’m sampling the production.*

*This means that you never use sampling as an instrument for referring to something?*

*Yes, I do. But that’s another layer of sampling in my work than what I just explained. On this second layer the sounds I’m using are actually reminding people of something specific such as other songs, a time, persons, or anything else. In this case the sample will actually serve as part of the message of the song and sometimes even replace lyrics. Instead of saying something, I can put the sound there. And when I put the sound there, because the listener knows what this sound is about, they will also understand what I want to talk about.*

*Do you sample on both layers in all of your songs?*

*In all songs I have at least the first layer, the technical one. That’s the foundation of the music in terms of how it’s been made. But in many other songs, there is also the second layer. (Liechti 2016b)*

Sampling on the first “technical” layer means to sample a sound because it has a particular aesthetic nature, while the second layer is more concerned with (extra-musical) meaning. Another example is provided by experimental producer Tomutonttu. He made a similar distinction when asked what makes him start working with
a sample, and how important the original meaning of a sample is: “I’m more in the school of ‘how does it sound’ than ‘how was it made.’” Accordingly, the producer is more interested in how a sample sounds than what it means, where it comes from, or what it refers to. In other words, his reasons for choosing particular samples are based on the aesthetic appearance of the sound rather than the layers of meaning behind it.

Beyond these two main approaches, a couple more were mentioned in my interviews. A third approach could be summarized as sampling as a means of production. This procedural approach encompasses sampling motives linked with the production process itself. In this instance, sampling helps to improve the production process, making it more comfortable or intuitive. Furthermore, some producers understood sampling as a concept (or a conceptual need) or as a social act. In the final and fourth approach, producers reported that sampling sometimes happens by accident.

Comparing these findings with the existing literature on sampling reviewed above, it is clear that the two categorizations broadly correspond. Based on these sources, I have developed my own terminology for use in the SSR:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Review (Table 3.4)</th>
<th>Interview Data</th>
<th>SSR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>intertextual and meaning-related</td>
<td>sampling as a referential tool</td>
<td>contextual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aesthetic</td>
<td>aesthetic reasons</td>
<td>material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accidental</td>
<td>sampling by accident</td>
<td>accidental</td>
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<tr>
<td>utilitarian and pragmatic</td>
<td>means for production</td>
<td>procedural</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conceptual</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sampling as a social act</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Categories of reasons for sampling

The intertextual and meaning-related approach from the academic literature directly corresponds with observations derived from the interview data (sampling as a referential tool). In the SSR, I label this category as “contextual” (red). It summarizes all reasons for sampling that relate to any (extra-musical) meaning of the sample source. In other words: when a particular sound was attractive enough to use because of its context. I consciously avoid using the terms “intertextual” and “referential” to describe this approach. I consider “intertextual” to be misleading, since almost every form of sampling establishes an intertextual relation. I avoid the word “referential” to prevent further confusion, since one could argue that every sound is referential per se.

The “material approach” (yellow) encompasses reasons for sampling where the nature of the material is key in the process of selection. I have labeled this category with the term “material” to

4 Here it is more a question of broader motives or motivations than of concrete intentions.
emphasize that it is the musical “material” (sounds, melodies, textures, etc.) that is crucial here. This category corresponds both with the interview data (sampling for aesthetic reasons) and with the “aesthetic” category from the academic literature. I have avoided the term “aesthetic” because this is a slippery concept, and not all reasons for sampling encompassed in this approach might be connected with “the nature and appreciation of beauty,” which is the core concern of aesthetics (Oxford 2019d).

The third category, the accidental approach (green), is mainly drawn from my interviews. It encompasses reasons for sampling that have occurred due to chance circumstances or factors. The academic literature largely ignores this aspect of sampling, except in the case of Harkins (2010a).

The last category, the procedural approach (blue), functions as a catch-all for a range of further reasons for sampling. They are all based on the possibilities or consequences that are enabled or implied by the process of sampling. Producers sample because sampling as a production technique allows them to limit themselves, to save money, to avoid blank project files, to simulate an instrument, to pursue a broader concept, etc. In short: sampling facilitates the process of musical composition. The academic literature broadly describes this approach as “utilitarian” or “pragmatic.” From my interviews, three strands are placed in this category: sampling as a means of production, conceptual sampling, and sampling as a social act. I will explain the particular sampling strategies behind these notions later.

There is a difference between general motives and motivations (why is a producer sampling at all?) and particular sampling motives and intentions (why did a producer sample a particular sound?). While the SSR has been developed with a focus on the latter, many procedural motives relate to the former. It can often be challenging to determine to which level a particular reason for sampling belongs (see discussion below). Using sampling as a compositional tool does not tell us much about the reasons why a particular sample has been selected. Moreover, procedural reasons might often appear supplementary and almost never primary. By dealing with political samples or samples that have been politicized, I identified, in most cases, deliberate reasons that could be categorized in either the first or the second approach (or both). Nevertheless, it makes sense to include this collective category in the model too. Although the reasons for sampling it encompasses might not be primary motives, they do play a role, and can at least partially explain sampling processes. However, to keep the model as simple as possible, I have decided to display this approach without further specifying it through sub-categories.
To sum up, the SSR displays a total of eight categories simultaneously. The four main sampling approaches are represented by a particular color. The contextual approach is represented by five sections, while the other three approaches feature one section each. The importance of a particular category can be indicated by modifying the size of the respective section. The scale encompasses five unnumbered levels, at the first of which the whole section is left empty, and at the last of which all four segments of a single section are covered with the relevant color. This instrument allows us to place emphasis on the various reasons for sampling: the bigger the colored area, the more important the respective approach appears for the analyzed sampling strategy. Often, one category could be regarded as constitutive or prevalent. However, emphasizing particular categories does not mean prioritizing some reasons for sampling over others in the chronology of the production process.

The model proposed here certainly has its limits. One is its temporal inflexibility. Approaches to sampling can change over time. In the case of the accidental approach, another motive or intention arises as soon as the sampling material is consciously recognized. In many cases motives might even shift constantly. It is not possible to make such a transformation visible with the SSR. Although the model allows for the display of a range of reasons for sampling, rather than one single intention or motive, the prioritization of the categories captures a particular moment in the history of the analyzed track; ideally, this might be the moment of the track’s release.

I have now introduced the SSR as a useful and flexible tool for the analysis of processes of sampling. The model allows for a detailed display of reasons for sampling as a conglomerate of various overlapping motivations, motives, and intentions. I will now continue with a discussion of each of the four approaches and their subcategories, illustrating them with examples from my interviews. The aim of this chapter, finally, is to reach an overview on the question of why artists sample in experimental electronica.

**Contextual Sampling: Driven by Meaning**

Most of the producers I asked about their reasons for sampling offered at least some answers which fall under the contextual approach. For them, the extra-musical context of the samples played an important role when they selected external sound material and worked with it. This fact is neither a surprise nor significant, as I mostly interviewed the producers of tracks in which I had recognized or assumed that the sampling material contained strong (contextual) meaning.

When interpreting these answers, I was confronted with the
two aforementioned levels of reasons for sampling. The first level responds to the question of why a producer is sampling in general. The second level focuses on the motives and intentions behind the selection of a particular sample. Reasons from both levels overlap or are even superimposable, and it is thus often challenging or even impossible to properly distinguish between them. During the interview process, producers constantly switched from describing their general sampling approaches to underlining them with concrete examples and explaining particular sampling motives and intentions. Conversely, it is often not possible to take these motives and intentions, explained in relation to concrete examples, as general reasons for sampling. This problem is further complicated by the fact that it is not possible to detect an exclusive chain of causality: I cannot tell whether I do something because of A, or do it because of B with A as the consequence (or the premise) of B. To deal with this problem, I have decided to establish two different categorizations on two levels of generalization. To precisely explain the reasons behind a particular sampling process we must always argue on both levels and simultaneously use both suggested categorizations.

The first level proposes a distinction between three general and overlapping fields of sampling motives. The second level is displayed in the SSR. The perspectives assembled here have been developed mainly based on the analysis of sampling strategies behind particular tracks.

**Inspiration, Communication, and Content: Sampling Motives**

![Figure 5.2: Overlapping fields of general motives behind contextual sampling](image)

Figure 5.2 illustrates three general fields of sampling motives. Producers sample out of communicational motives (they want to express or convey a message, a concept, or a story by using particular samples); they sample because of a special interest in the

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5 I speak about motives here to indicate the general character of this level. When speaking about more concrete reasons as part of the SSR, I will rely on the terms motivation and intention (see n2 above).
General Motive 1: Inspiration

The first field describes instances where a producer chooses a sample because they are inspired by particular source material. Such an inspiration can be vague and hard to grasp, or it can be concrete: sound material can trigger associations, thoughts, and memories which, in turn, become reasons for processing the material in question. Often, and as distinct from the other two fields, the meaning that a sample brings from its source context does not play any further role in the sampling process. An example of this comes from Katie Gately, who in my interview described her process of selection as partly relying on extra-musical dimensions: “If a sample is texturally exciting and has strong meaningful associations then it becomes overwhelmingly seductive to work with” (Liechti 2017c). She further specified what it is that attracts her when sampling sounds:

The samples I gravitate towards tend to be of two kinds. First are the striking sounds. The ones that take me out of my daily life and inspire the possibility of a bigger, imaginary world. Second are the ones that feel very close, personal and overtly emotionally expressive. (Ibid.)

Both kinds of samples described by Gately trigger extra-musical associations and memories, which is why she processes them in her tracks. The first kind of sounds trigger associations that are more abstract and fictional. These sounds inspire her to think about the conception of a “bigger, imaginary world.” However, the second group of sounds relates to concrete and personal memories, especially from childhood. In this way, Gately uses sampling as a quasi-psychological tool for treating biographical experiences, as I have illustrated elsewhere (Liechti 2017c). Gately processed these samples neither because she wanted to communicate something, nor because she was interested in the topical content connected with them.

Ian McDonnell, the producer behind one of the case studies in this book, provides another example. When sampling, his aim is to add “richness” to the composition, as he told me:

Often, the original sound you intended to record is not the most interesting thing. It’s like sculpture in a way—
starting with a dense sound and then carving it to reveal something else. I suppose that is why I like to sample—good samples are so rich, in a way that purely synthesized sound is sometimes not (...). But the layers of sonic possibilities contained in one sample, and also the layers of meaning—cultural, geographical, physical, personal, where you sampled it, what that sample means, and what it means to manipulate it—give it a richness I find very attractive.

I used to enjoy using really messed up samples (maybe inspired by Aphex Twin!), but not so much anymore. Now I am looking for samples with more interesting humanitarian, spiritual or political resonances.

Accordingly, a perfect sample should not only contain a variety of “sonic possibilities”—this would fall under the material approach—but also various “layers of meaning.” The primary intention here is an additive one: it is about adding extra-musical elements to the composition. What is important is that the samples have different layers of meaning, which enrich the composition itself as much as the process of composition. This richness in the given sampling material inspires the producer to work with it.

Both examples show a close relationship to the material approach: the border between material and contextual reasons is indeed fluid here. In many cases, aesthetic reasons for choosing a sample might be even more important. In summary, extra-musical meaning plays a role in the field of “inspiration,” but it is not primary. Even more than that: as soon as interest in the extra-musical content grows, the process leaves the realm of vague inspiration, and one of the other two fields might be more appropriate to describe the strategy in question.

Almost all of the case studies in this book show elements of inspiration. This might show that inspiration is an essential reason behind many sampling processes: to sample means to be inspired by sound material. However, in most cases, another field ultimately becomes more crucial. There is one case study in which the field of inspiration is of paramount importance (“Perversas”) and another in which I could not identify any substantial reason in this field (“STABILIZED, YES!”).

**General Motive 2: Communication**

Sampling is further used to express or convey something. The communicated “something” can range from a vague reference point or a political message to a more elaborate story or broader concept. In most cases, the receiver of this act of communication is the potential listener, but this does not have to be the case. It is
also possible for producers to include statements or messages in their tracks without making them obvious or recognizable to the listener. In these cases, the communicative act remains unfinished (such as in “kenats” by Lara Sarkissian) or is intentionally self-addressed to the producer’s persona.

The inclusion of reference points has already been described by Ptyl. He told me that the sounds he uses seek to remind “people of something specific such as other songs, a time, persons, or anything else” (Liechti 2016b). He understands sounds as “allusions” and considers them to be “bookmarks”: “Sampling allows the listener to go to the origin and to learn some stuff.” Similarly, San Ignacio considers samples to be “epigraphs (a symbolic and clearly well-used fragment, with a mainly inspirational purpose).” He simultaneously links back to the first general motive mentioned: inspiration.

Mauro Guz Bejar, the producer of the case study “Libres,” also aims to construct a message through sampling. He understands “sampling as a weapon of expanding or remembering a message.” Similar to Guz Bejar, producers often use sampling as an active strategy for the expression of political opinions. Another representative of this strategy is Bonaventure. Through sampling, the producer aims not least to “be part of conversations,” as she explained:

*I’m basically using music and samples to make sure that the politics are also in the clubs and in the mouths of people that are younger and I think it’s also super important to use the sonic heritage to talk about subjects that are a little bit more serious. And yeah, I came to realize that it’s not only about partying and having fun and I think this project also allows me to be part of conversations in a way. Because I’m not doing any vocals. It’s not really my style actually to talk about this kind of stuff, but through the music, I could also reach out to people.*

Sampling as a tool to disseminate opinions or to take part in conversations and discourses is also important for other producers, such as Chino Amobi: “In working with these well-known sounds, I open spaces for diverse, dialectic, and controversial interpretations; I raise questions and inspire discussions both small and large” (Amobi 2015). Similarly, Mauro Guz Bejar also talked about sampling as “a way to agree with some ideas.”

In the quotation above, Bonaventure pointed to a characteristic aspect of electronic popular music in particular: the absence of the singing voice, or the lack of more elaborate lyrics. Sampling steps into this breach, and is widely used as a strategy for replacing lyrics. Ptyl mentioned that in some cases the “sample will actually serve
as part of the message of the song and sometimes even replace lyrics” (Liechti 2016b). For Dapper Dan, sampling is “a means of creating an environment in which an intensity beyond the limits of articulation can be achieved.” This aspect becomes apparent in the case studies, particularly in Vika Kirchenbauer’s “STABILIZED, YES!”

Dr. Das also uses sampling as a political tool for communication. He understands sampling as “an act of militancy—a commentary on how it felt to be second generation ‘migrants,’ and a reaction to prejudice and cultural exclusion” (Liechti 2017b). Dapper Dan regards sampling “as a fundamentally political act” and a “means of articulating politics.” He further considers sampling to be a tool for “writing history.” This political motivation corresponds with the notion of the “archive,” which was mentioned from time to time during the interviews. Establishing an archive through sampling can be considered a highly political project, as Alice Aterianus-Owanga (2016) illustrates in her case study of Gabon. Beyond the field of experimental electronica, Jamaican dancehall duo Equiknoxx also use sampling for the purposes of documentation, as described in an interview with FACT Magazine:

[Jordan] Chung believes that there is something meaningful in the simple act of recording your surroundings, namely as an antidote to the horrors of the human-made world. “We live in an age where we’re able to do these things and it’s important that if the average man feels like he wants to capture this thing just to be a part of his soul or even to shape the world, it’s important that this person is able to do it – even for future generations to have these things for reference,” he says. “What a particular street in Jamaica sounds like now might sound different in the next ten years and the man that recorded that just for his own fulfilment or joy... they might even end up in the national library one day.” (Welsh 2017)

Among my interviewees, Lara Sarkissian perhaps best exemplifies the adoption of such a strategy. She uses sampling as a deliberate “way of archiving and accessing sounds” from her Armenian heritage.

Many producers sample by directly addressing the contextual meaning of their source material. Others use their samples more symbolically, aiming to combine a larger number of samples to express or convey a greater concept. Producer LXV, for example, described a sampling approach in which samples are “intentionally obscured from their original context” but nevertheless “convey ideas that lead to a greater concept as a whole.” The producer aims “to create an environment based on a conceptual worldview as opposed to directly connecting multiple physical locations on a surface level.” Brood Ma and Ital likewise described the use of samples in service to greater concepts. Brood Ma mentioned that “a
lot of the samples I use are exploring, or trying to disassemble, the idea of masculinity” (Simshäuser 2017, 43), while Ital connected sampling to the increasing amount of information available online:

*At the time, I had the feeling (and still do today, although I’m more used to it) of information and the web insidiously encroaching on every aspect of human existence, and decided to give voice to this by weaving lots of weird, semi-corrupted, often time-stretched mp3 sounds into the fabric of the album.*

The construction of a story could also be included in this category. Matthew Herbert feels that when he is sampling (mostly highly political) sound material “it’s storytelling after all.” A similar approach, although perhaps more personal and less political, was described by Dasychira:

*With field recordings on my iPhone, I get to illustrate my daily existence, from my morning commute to Manhattan to going outside with friends. Sampling is the way I craft stories out of my music. (...) I construct often visual metaphors out of samples and sounds to tell stories that are somewhat autobiographical.*

I have so far discussed communicative sampling motives where the listeners are potentially addressed through concrete reference points, messages, concepts, ideas, or stories. Beyond this, communication with the listener can also be established through more abstract elements such as experiences, memories, atmospheres, and spaces. Dapper Dan described trying to picture a particular atmosphere that he experienced when growing up, as “a form of reaching out to someone who can articulate that experience too.” James Whipple, featured in one of the case studies later, uses samples to “create or replicate different spaces and transitions between spaces.” He emphasized the communicational intent behind this process: “You can play with the subtleties of hearing because you’re creating different spaces that the listener unconsciously or consciously situates himself in when they’re listening.”

This section has assembled a broad range of communicative conceptions of sampling. With regard to this study, it might be especially tempting to assume similar conceptions due to its focus on political material. However, the case studies will show that communicative motives are not always key. On the contrary: I identified such motivations as primary in only two tracks (“STABILIZED, YES!” and “Libres”). In two tracks, other fields are of higher significance (“Perversas” and “kenats”), while

*Communicative motives are not always key.*

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8 Here I quote Brood Ma from an article in *The Wire* instead of from my own interview data, as this quotation summarizes more convincingly the point I am making.

9 I use the word “potentially” to point to the remark at the beginning of this section: that there are also cases where these communicative elements remain fully or partially concealed for the listener.
in one track, I could not identify such a motive at all (“Methy Imbiß”). This observation echoes Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990, 17), who argues that the sphere of “the poietic [the process of creation] is not necessarily destined to end in communication.”

**General Motive 3: Content**

The third general motive uses sampling to (critically) engage with materials, topics, subjects, or positions. Producers don’t just sample because a particular sample sounds good, because it inspires them, or because they want to convey a message through it. They also sample because they want to engage with the context that the sample comes from. The strategies assembled here do not exclude the aim to communicate, or to choose samples because they inspire the compositional process. However, at least in the first instance, the extra-musical content of the sampling material is primary. Producers sample because they are interested in particular layers of meaning the samples bring along, and because they seek a more elaborate engagement with these layers.

Interestingly, I cannot draw many quotations from my interviews to illustrate this field. Most of the answers that I will quote contain traces of communicational intents. The banality of this category might be one possible explanation for this lack of data. Being simply interested in a topic seems a very banal explanation, at least at first glance. As a consequence, many producers might not be aware of this reason, and it was not mentioned during the interviews. Reasons for sampling may also change during the process of sampling. Having started with not much more than a general interest in a context or topical area, the sampling intention might morph towards a communicative message as the process progresses.

The “content” category is important to consider particularly because it evolved out of the case studies featured in this book. Vika Kirchenbauer said that sampling allows her to “engage with material in a critical manner.” It is the “deconstruction” of musical source material through sampling that finally allowed her to critically engage with themes of colonialism, power, and oppression. James Whipple, meanwhile, included war footage from Eastern Ukraine in his track “Methy Imbiß” because he was deeply interested in the political events of the time when he was producing his first album.

Especially when sampling historical material, a choice of sample can often be explained with a general interest in the aspects of history being sampled. In the existing academic literature, the importance of time to the technique of sampling has been constantly emphasized. Simon Waters (2000, 64), for example, considers sampling a “tool of time

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**Producers sample because they are interested in particular layers of meaning the samples bring along, and because they seek a more elaborate engagement with these layers.**
manipulation,” and Simon Reynolds (2011, 313) describes it as “a mixture of time travel and séance.” Reynolds is pointing to an unusual characteristic of sampling: it can bring together people and locations from different time periods that could not meet in real life. Among my interviewees, Arash Azadi referred to sampling as “a doorway to exploring different musical cultures.” For him one of the main uses of sampling is “to bring [together] musical quotations from different cultures and different time periods.” Others, such as DJ Kala, tended to indulge in some sort of nostalgia through sampling: “I sampled (...) to add bits of nostalgia from my surroundings growing up.” Like Reynolds, DJ Kala pointed to a metaphysical understanding of sampling: “You can also view the sample as something from the past being resurrected, giving it new life.”

The engagement with one’s own identity and the tracing of different spaces of belonging is a more personal form of engagement with history. Researchers have argued that rap producers used sampling to express a Black cultural identity in sound (Rose 1994, Demers 2003). In any case, sampling seems to be predestined to engage materially with various forms of belonging and identities through sound. Among my interviewees, this was repeatedly understood as a significant motivating force behind the use of the technique. Dr. Das referred to sampling as “a means of accessing sounds from—and therefore expressing our relationship to—the cultures of our parents” (Liechti 2017b). Among the case studies featured in this book, Lara Sarkissian was most prominent in articulating this, describing how she samples sounds from Armenian cultural history as a way of rooting herself in a diasporic community.

Finally, Paul Théberge (1997, 205), referring to Tricia Rose’s (1994) pioneering study on Black rap, describes sampling as “a form of ‘dialogue’ with the past.” This interpretation corresponds with my interviews, in which Dapper Dan, for example, described sampling as “a way of paying respects to the history,” and Bonaventure emphasized its function as homage: “I feel like sampling is just a beautiful way to give homage to artists that were there before. I think it’s also a beautiful way to acknowledge work that has been done so far.”

This section has illustrated the three distinct general sampling motives, whereby the selection and processing of samples can be guided by communicative aims, inspirational impulses, or topical interests. As the case studies will show, the sampling process is mostly shaped by a combination of at least two of these fields. This categorization allows for a first and rough description of sampling.

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10 When describing the sampling practice of techno producer Hans Nieswandt, Jochen Bonz likewise describes sampling as an anachronistic process that enables a medium where people with all sorts of positions and attitudes can meet (Bonz 2008, 110). By taking a Reynolds quotation as a point of departure, Michail Exarchos (aka Stereo Mike) offers a fascinating comparison between sample-based music and the art form of performance magic (Exarchos 2019).
practices. In the next step, we must concern ourselves with the more specific motivations and intentions behind sampling processes.

**From Active to Strategic: Perspectives in Sampling Intentions**

By analyzing the basic track pool of this study and evaluating the interviews I conducted, I have developed five main perspectives in sampling intentions (active, narrative, neutral, personal, and strategic) and one sub-perspective (solidary). These are subcategories of the contextual approach, displayed in red in the SSR. Table 5.2 provides both an overview on the perspectives and examples of the intentions and motives they encompass. I will now continue by illustrating each perspective in alphabetical order, with examples from my interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Example Motives and Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>active</td>
<td>to comment, to criticize, to protest; to provide alternative perspectives; to communicate a specific (political) message or statement; to document, to archive; to construct messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solidary</td>
<td>to show solidarity with minorities; to sensitize; to raise awareness or funding; to speak for someone; to give voice to somebody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrative</td>
<td>to express an emotion or a feeling; to open, create, or build (new) spaces, (new) worlds, or (new) moods; to spatialize; to craft stories and narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>to be interested in the sample and its contextual meaning; to be fascinated by certain material or themes; to capture a particular moment; to contextualize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal</td>
<td>to position within places, spaces, times, or communities; to discuss issues of personal biography and questions of identity; to express belonging; to recall or reimagine memories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategic</td>
<td>to gain attention, a wider audience, financial success and/or recognition; to position within a certain genre, scene, or tradition; to feel part of something; to connect with other people; to provoke</td>
</tr>
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Table 5.2: Five perspectives in contextual sampling intentions

(a) The Active Perspective

The first perspective combines active motives and intentions, such as sampling to convey a (political) message, statement, or opinion. Within this perspective, producers comment, criticize, or protest on—in particular—political issues and subjects. Through sampling, they document and archive such issues, and they present alternative perspectives, or “dialectic and controversial interpretations,” as Chino Amobi (2015) puts it. In this perspective, samples are predominantly used to communicate. In the case studies which follow, the active perspective plays a key role in the analyses of Vika Kirchenbauer’s “STABILIZED, YES!,” Lara Sarkissian’s “kenats,” and Mauro Guz Bejar’s “Libres.”

In terms of examples beyond the case studies, I must once
again cite the example of Matthew Herbert. As Paul Harkins shows, Herbert “uses the digital sampler as the basis for political statements about capitalism, globalization, and consumerism” (Harkins 2016, 243). In most cases, Herbert’s sampling strategies are obvious and clearly communicated. Regarding the present perspective under discussion, we could establish the following general rule: the less obvious a sample appears, the more other perspectives of the SSR—such as the neutral and personal perspectives—need to be considered. However, I still categorize sampling strategies as at least partially “active” as long as they contain clear political messages, even if they are fully or partially concealed. In Herbert’s conversation with Harkins, the producer recounted such a case:

*There’s an opportunity to smuggle those sounds into a Eurovision song contest. I did the sounds in between the films when Russia hosted it [in 2009] so I had to come up with one for Israel and they had all these happy skateboarders in Israel. I was like I can’t just pretend that Israel is one happy skateboarding family so I had the sounds of these gunshots and Palestinian homes being bulldozed. You can still hear it. I can’t believe I got away with it. You can hear it all. It’s pretty great to be subversive on that sort of scale but I think the important thing is it’s music first. It should draw people in.* (Matthew Herbert after Harkins 2016, 245)

This sampling strategy could be interpreted as a silent protest or a way of salving one’s own conscience. One could argue that the sampling strategy lost its concealed character as soon as Herbert talked about it in public. However, in sharp contrast to his usually far more active communication regarding the sources and origins of his sampling material, Herbert still refuses to discuss this case. Beyond Harkins’s dissertation, no further information on this sampling strategy is available.\(^\text{11}\) I assume from this that there are more concealed sampling strategies, in the work of Matthew Herbert and others, that nonetheless contain political messages and could be attached to the active perspective.

**(b) The Solidary Perspective**

Because this study focuses on political sampling strategies, it is understandable that the active perspective is emphasized more than others. Due to this focus, the active perspective is the only of my categories for which I will introduce a subcategory. When asking about sampling intention in my interviews, a solidary perspective often came up. This category encompasses sampling strategies by which producers aim to raise awareness for the position of minorities.
The producers do not (or only partly) belong to these groups. If they considered themselves to fully belong to these groups, the personal perspective might be more appropriate to describe their strategy. The solidary perspective will be addressed in the analysis of Mauro Guz Bejar’s “Libres.”

A further example can be found in the recording project #Rojava, initiated in early 2016 by female:pressure, a global network for women in electronic music. The project description from their own website reads as follows:

This campaign primarily aims at raising awareness around the resistance movement currently taking place in the cantons of #Rojava (located in northern Syria), where women participate on all levels of decision making and building a new society from scratch, with built-in social, racial and ethnic justice, religious freedom, ecological principles and gender equality. Despite vast cultural and historical differences between Western countries and Kurdistan, the campaign uses art & music to bridge these and build long-lasting real-life connections based on dialogue and respect, involving as many Kurdish musicians and activists as possible. (female:pressure 2016)

One component of the campaign was the compilation Music, Awareness & Solidarity w/ Rojava Revolution (2016), released by female:pressure on Bandcamp. The digital sale revenues from this project were donated to a London-based association of Rojava women. One of the aims of the project was thus to raise funding. Some of the tracks on the compilation are shaped by the sampling of sounds from the Rojava region and from women fighters—mostly sourced from documentary movies accessible online.

In “Afraid of Women,” one of the tracks on this album, sound artist Olivia Louvel sampled stomping boots, fighters arming their weapons, shouts, and voices. These sounds create for the listener a kind of drill ground atmosphere. For Louvel, it was important to sample the voices of the women fighters whom the project was addressing: “It was about giving those women a voice so I had to use their voices obviously” (Liechti 2018a). This was also the main motivation behind the track: “In the end there was a purpose. The purpose was not to make some new music, it was to give those women a voice.” Louvel used her own voice in the piece—for the whispered parts in the track’s introductory first half—as a way of appropriating the sampled material: “I am making my own object out of all these objects.”

Such a project raises some ethical questions that might be characteristic of the solidary perspective. Why is a sound artist who has never been to Rojava, and who has no closer connection to the context, sampling such material? How does the artist legitimate their strategy? Does the track glorify fighting women? Does
such a project perhaps even glorify war? During the production process, Louvel confronted herself with these kinds of questions. In our conversation, she emphasized the importance of the moment when working on such a project:

> **What is my legitimacy in appropriating those documentaries, working from found footage to make an audiovisual [artwork] about these women in Rojava? I had a similar approach for the project “o, music for haiku” using haiku by Japanese poet Basho even though I have never been to Japan... and I certainly do not speak Japanese. I used the material as a texture, composing with it. It is not my primary concern, if people think I should not be doing that. My approach is spontaneous. I am driven to talk about it so I just do it. I start on impulse... and then I question it afterwards. (Ibid.)**

kritzkom’s track from the same compilation, “Inner March for Utopia”, provides another example. When I contacted the producer via email, she told me about a sample of the Kurdish national anthem that she had processed in the track. As I could not recognize the anthem in the track, and as the producer has never spoken about the sample in public, I wanted to trace the sample directly in the Live files at her home studio. What we subsequently found was only one note of the anthem’s melody, sustained and looped. In the final mix the sample almost disappears, adding just a touch of texture. However, the snippet is still important for the track, as it represents kritzkom’s engagement with the topic of the women fighters in Rojava during the production process. In the end, the sample has survived as a kind of musical DNA: it is there, concealed, but when removed something seems to be missing. kritzkom herself considers the sample to be “kind of a ‘pre-text,’ a text that was there before the track and that has inspired it” (Liechti 2018b).

Both tracks illustrate the character of sampling strategies in the solidary perspective, once again ranging from obvious to concealed examples. These strategies aim to speak for someone or to give voice to somebody. They also raise controversial ethical questions that the producers deal with during or after the production process.

**c) The Narrative Perspective**

This perspective covers sound clips that are used as compositional building blocks to express emotions or feelings, to spatialize, or to open, create, or build spaces, worlds, or moods. Samples are used here to craft stories and narratives. These stories could be abstract and fictional as well as realistic and referring to the real world. However, it should be noted that stories can also be told through sampling with an active or a personal perspective. Accordingly, reasons
for sampling are only categorized in the narrative perspective if they do not fit into one of the other categories. J.G. Biberkopf spoke about “creating soundscapes” and Future Daughter about using “emotional connections associated with sound” when describing strategies with such a narrative perspective. In these cases, sampling is used to add atmosphere to a composition, to construct fictional spaces, or to enrich fictional stories.

James Whipple often samples within this category. In his track “Nemorum Incola” (on the 2017 album *Hesaitix*) he sampled jungle sounds in order to frame “things into little scenes.” In the track “Mimic” from the same album, the producer processed the sound of a recording device or microphone being pulled “out of a bag or something similar” as a “transition tool” to signal “the next part of something.” In “Kritikal & X,” from his debut album *Piteous Gate* (2015), Whipple sampled an argument between two Counter-Strike gamers from a YouTube video, using it to support a particular “street scene” in the style of a Shakespearian play he had in mind (Liechti 2017i).

Another example is a sampling project from RE:VIVE. For the compilation *010* (2016), this initiative from the Dutch Institute for Sound and Vision invited artists to work with archival sounds from the city of Rotterdam. Some sampled the bells of the city’s biggest church, the Grote of Sint-Laurenskerk. But these producers didn’t aim to communicate something about this particular church so much as evoke a certain atmosphere. Roly Porter, for example, noticed that

> there is something in the nature of church bells that helps you widen your perspective on a city. (...) Often, because the environment is built up, it is hard to look beyond your current position in a city, but church bells pull you into a larger perspective. In the track, I attempted to process the bells in a way that gave the impression of the sound being stretched over an increasing distance, beginning in close vicinity of the church and then opening out as though hearing them from the other side of the city, or traveling away from them. (Liechti 2017e)

Meta described sampling the bells as a way to bring emotion into his track:

> When I was creating my track, “Eva,” I knew I wanted to use the bells for a melody to bring emotion to the dense industrial sounds I’d been working with. The bells were the best option to create some tones with. Adding these tones boosted the track to the “greater power” it needed. The track no longer sounded like it was just a machine, it had become a machine with divine power. (Ibid.)

Both Roly Porter and Meta used the church bell sample to set up a particular atmosphere. Roly Porter spatialized his track, while Meta used the extra-musical connotations of the sound to “humanize”
his composition. A further example of narrative sampling is Chino Amobi’s EP *Airport Music for Black Folk* (2016). In the EP’s tracks, named after European cities, he sampled sounds such as gunshots and field recordings from airports to express a desired feeling: “I used sounds in each song which I felt reflected the mood I experienced while visiting each city.”

The producer Brood Ma told me that he has sampled debates from the Houses of Parliament in London, though he declined to mention the exact tracks in which he processed this material. Because the samples were processed in a concealed way, it is thus not possible to identify the tracks in question. When asked about the motivation behind sampling these sounds, the producer sketched a sampling strategy that uses sound material not to express a (political) message or commentary (active perspective), but to convey a certain mood or atmosphere—in this case the cacophonous character of the sample material:

> If you were ever to watch Prime Minister’s question time in the U.K. and then see the parties screaming at each other (…), it’s like a cacophonous thing which I kind of like. (…) It’s almost like a horror effect in some of the stuff I did. I’m not so into sampling things so directly, you know like political speeches and things like this. I think my music is quite about feeling something, so I will take those signifiers and just make them more kind of textural than directly have like, as I said, a political speech or whatever, because I want music to be a bit more timeless as well.

Extra-musical layers of meaning play a role in all of these examples. The bells had to come from a church from Rotterdam; Chino Amobi’s samples convey an abstract feeling, as do the fervid and cacophonous British parliament debates sampled by Brood Ma. However, the producers are not tempted to construct a concrete message out of these layers of meaning (which would align them with the active perspective). Instead, they use these sounds as a point of departure and a compositional building block. In the case studies, the narrative perspective is reflected most strongly in Ian McDonnell’s “Perversas.”

A sample’s material appearance can also help to express a certain atmosphere or feeling. In the narrative perspective in particular, it is sometimes challenging to distinguish between a contextual and a material approach: has a particular sample been selected because of its (extra-musical) meaning or because it sounds the way it does? If the latter is the case, we would need to highlight the material approach in the SSR in addition to, or instead of, the narrative perspective (as a subcategory of the contextual approach).
(d) The Neutral Perspective

The next perspective encompasses all contextual reasons for sampling that approach their source material in a neutral manner. There is no active or strategic motivation, personal connection, or narrative intention behind them. (Of course, this perspective might change in the course of the sampling process.) This perspective is invoked whenever a producer engages with particular material out of pure interest. Interest in and fascination for the material guides the process in the first instance. Without a deeper analysis of the sampling processes in question, it is difficult to come up with striking examples here. This is because categorizing a sampling strategy under this perspective is a mostly speculative exercise. In most cases, more information on reasons for sampling is needed before one can decide whether the neutral perspective is in play.

The duo Lakker, one of whose members is Ian McDonnell (who is featured in one of the case studies), provides one example. For their album *Struggle & Emerge* (2016), the duo were invited by the aforementioned Dutch initiative RE:VIVE to process archival sounds documenting the relationship between the Dutch people and the sea. I suggest a neutral perspective here because, given their lack of personal relation to the topic, it is reasonable to imagine that the producers might have been purely interested in working with these sounds and their contexts (leaving aside their being motivated by the opportunities the project itself offers, which would be covered either in the strategic perspective or in the procedural approach). An in-depth example of a sampling strategy shaped by the neutral perspective will be provided in the case study of James Whipple’s “Methy Imbiß.”

(e) The Personal Perspective

In this perspective, samples are processed because they relate to producers’ biographies and contexts. Sampling is applied in order to address or discuss personal experiences, articulate identities, or express belonging. In this perspective, sampling is about positioning within places, spaces, times, or communities, closely related to the producer’s own identity. This perspective allows producers to incorporate their own lived experience into their music.

Ukrainian producer Zavoloka, for example, made recordings on Maidan square in Kyiv during winter 2013–14, originally with the intention of documenting the ongoing revolution in her home country. She had no specific aim to further process the recordings, until Russia’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in spring 2014 left her with the urge to position herself as Ukrainian. In 2014 she produced the record *Volya* (2014) out of samples from her field
recordings. I asked her about the moment when she finally decided to work on these tracks:

Some weeks later Russia started the war with Ukraine. That was the moment when I thought that I, as a Ukrainian, have to say something. I then simply called this EP “freedom” (English for Volya). In a way this was like a meditation for me, kind of my personal fight. Usually I never do this kind of political art. (Liechti 2017d)

Bonaventure, meanwhile, repeatedly deals with the topic of race on her debut EP FREE LUTANGU (2017). Her engagement with this subject is motivated by her multi-ethnic identity as a mixed-race individual; indeed, it was her experience of racism, alongside a tragic death in her family, that brought her into music. Since the beginning of her musical career, the producer has thus used music in general and sampling in particular as a vehicle to discuss questions of racism and identity (Kretowicz 2016). In the track “Mulatre” (“mulatto”), for example, she mixed samples of Black and white origin:

During my upbringing, a lot of people were actually asking me if I feel more white or more Black, which is a question that is super alarming. (…) People around me really ask me to choose somehow. I felt last year that I need to do a track whose words really say fuck you to that and where I could mix everything. Like very white stuff that influences me but also stuff from the Black culture and also stuff that is more generally pop music.

In “Mulatre,” she mixed together, among other samples, a snippet from Mozart’s famous choral piece “Lacrimosa,” Malian singer Oumou Sangaré, a traditional choir from Benin, Beyoncé, and Michael Jackson. While these samples are all processed in an audible way, Bonaventure pursues a different strategy on “Supremacy,” the first track on the same album. Here, the main sample, a political speech by the Black author, activist, and artist Sister Souljah, is also fully audible. But it contrasts with another sample in the drums: the sounds of dead bodies falling from a roof onto a floor, taken from a documentary on the Rwandan civil war and genocide. These samples remain completely concealed, while again dealing with the topic of race.

Other sampling strategies shaped by an engagement with personal identities and biographies have been mentioned in the preceding sections, among them Katie Gately, with her use of sampling as a quasi-psychological tool for treating biographical experiences (Liechti 2017c); Dasychira (“I construct often visual metaphors out of samples and sounds to tell stories that are somewhat autobiographical”); and Dr. Das (for whom sampling is “a commentary on how it felt to be second generation ‘migrants’”). In the case studies which follow, this perspective is most clearly adopted by Lara Sarkissian in “kenats” and Mauro Guz Bejar in “Libres.”
In the final of our five perspectives, sampling is a strategic tool. Samples are chosen because the producer hopes to gain attention, to reach a wider audience, or to attain recognition and/or financial success. A typical example would involve sampling a famous hookline to secure a surefire hit. However, the desire to gain attention need not be limited to the commercial sphere. By strategically including specific signature sounds, producers place a track in a certain scene or genre and try to connect with the communities around them. Producer Mauro Guz Bejar referred to these kinds of samples as “anchor points for people to gather around.” Bonaventure regarded samples as “starting points into conversations.” Moreover, she added that sampling allows her to feel part of communities:

I started to sample because I was really looking for this community feeling, I was looking for ways of giving tribute to people that I’m listening to and all that I was listening to. (...) I really like to use that also as starting points into conversations. And yeah, it also gives me the feeling that I’m part of the community.

Well-known samples that are used in this sense include the amen break (extensively processed in drum and bass), the air horn (dancehall and reggae), and the Ha-sample (vogue/ballroom). Ian McDonnell told me that a similar strategy was important in the earlier stages of his career:

In the past, I’ve often used samples, say from jungle music or from reggae samples in jungle music, to feel part of that whole world of music, which I had no direct connection to, but which I loved and wanted to be part of in some way.

When I started out, I really wanted to position myself within the dance music, club music world; that’s what I felt most passionate about. And I wanted to use these samples that were part of the language of electronic dance music because I wanted to be part of that world. And I wanted it to be obvious. That’s what it was. I wanted people to be drawn to the music, for that reason.

Other strategies that could be included in the strategic perspective are more provocative or experimental. As DJ Empty, Matthew Herbert released a dance music record (Meaningless, 2017) consisting of samples of bombs, shells, and bullets. In an interview, he explained his motivation behind the record: “I wanted to see if people would just dance to anything. What impact would it have?

12 Strategies like this become more relevant in mainstream popular music. Déon (2011, 285) and Sinnreich (2010, 131, 168) refer to this practice.
13 For a history of the Ha-sample see Host (2012); for the amen break see, for example, Morey (2017, 185) or Harrison (2016).
Would anyone make inquiries? Nobody gave a shit” (Burkhalter 2015a, 187). In other words, Herbert strategically used samples to trigger reactions in the listener. In this case, attention was not guaranteed, but was rather the object of an experiment.

Finally, strategic sampling can also be applied negatively. That is to say, samples might not be used because the producer is worried about the attention they could attract, or any other unwanted reaction they might provoke. Sound artist Olivia Louvel, for example, processed the voice of a Kurdish woman fighter from the Syrian Rojava region in the aforementioned track “Afraid of Women.” When the track was later broadcast by the BBC, Louvel had to cut the part with the sample. The producer recalled:

*I did not have an exact translation of the Kurdish voice on the track’s last minute. BBC have some regulations especially when it is a language that sounds Arabic and so they could not play the last part. They were probably worried it might contain a message of hate or something like that.* (Liechti 2018a)

Hence, the strategic perspective not only concerns producers who want to trigger desired reactions or gain attention, but also those who avoid samples or alter their use of them for fear of particular reactions or of losing attention. In many cases, such strategies might occur unconsciously. Assessing the strategic perspective might thus often rely on subjective interpretation. Many producers may not want to speak openly about strategic reasons for sampling, especially if they are motivated by economic considerations.

In the realm of political sampling, another potential strategy could be included here: propaganda. I will not discuss this highly controversial strategy further, as I cannot rely on suitable data. Indeed, this is the case for the entire strategic perspective, which is the only perspective that will not be present in the case studies below.

After this detailed discussion of the contextual reasons behind sampling strategies, I will now turn to the other approaches featured on the SSR. In the case studies I will primarily rely on the contextual approach, meaning the other three approaches are not examined in the same depth. Doing this would require further studies with different methods and a different focus. However, as the case studies below illustrate, a sampling strategy can almost never be reduced to one single approach or perspective. Hence the bigger picture, including other relevant approaches, is crucial for a better and more complete understanding of the culture of sampling.
Material Sampling: 
Like a Musical Instrument

When producers stated that they “try to look away from political and cultural meaning” (Future Daughter) when they sample, or that they “try to free material on which (...) [they] work from context which isn’t musical” (Genetics & Windsurfing), they were mostly referring to the second approach in our schema of reasons for sampling: the material approach. Sampling, in this approach, is “sampling for musical reasons” (Mauro Guz Bejar) or “sonic reasons” (Ian McDonnell). This approach is primarily guided by an interest in the question “how does it sound,” rather than “how was it made” (Tomutonttu). Future Daughter compared sampling to the use of a musical instrument:

“We see the computer as our main instrument, and to us, samples work as equal to sound from a traditional instrument.” Ratkiller, speaking more generally, considers samples to be “separate notes.” Such an understanding of sampling emphasizes the musical quality of a sample as key in the process of selection.

I use the “material approach” to describe those sampling strategies that primarily deal with the musical or material aspects of samples. They are concerned with finding ways to conceal or ignore the layers of meaning, such as associations or references, that the sampling material brings along with it. Similarly, Joanna Demers (2010, 61) briefly mentions a “materialist approach toward sampling,” describing “a natural consequence of a musical environment where all sounds are viewed as objects,” and where solutions are developed to manage the associations that are brought to new works “from their original environment.”

I have identified two main arguments made by my interviewees. Some argued that they sample because of particular qualities of the source material—mostly to do with its sound. Others argued that they sample to create something new within, or add something new to, the emerging composition. Inspiration (the first argument) and innovation (the second) can thus be regarded as two motives on a general level—comparable with the first-level categorization of the contextual approach illustrated earlier in this chapter. Material sampling reasons could conceivably be divided on a further, second level, according to parameters of musical quality such as harmony, melody, rhythm, timbre, and texture. However, as mentioned before, I will not focus on further categorization of the material approach in this study.

For a critical discussion of the term “material” see Chapter 2.
J.G. Biberkopf described the process of sampling as a way to “bring out certain qualities” of the samples, while Future Daughter emphasized that they mainly put their “interest and energy into sonic characteristics.” These “qualities” and “characteristics” distinguish the sampling material from sounds created by synthesis, as Arash Azadi explained: “Sampling for me is a way to capture sounds, motifs, phrases, or themes that are unique in character and also acoustically rich in a way that they stand [out] from common electronically produced sounds.” Ian McDonnell echoed this point: “I suppose that is why I like to sample—good samples are so rich, in a way that purely synthesized sound is sometimes not.”

On another occasion, when trying to describe what attracts him to samples, McDonnell referred to their “interesting sonic quality” or “layers of sonic possibilities.” Genetics & Windsurfing, when describing a similar aspect, pointed to the “expressive and complex” nature of the sampled sounds, while Ptyl highlighted the importance of considering the entirety of sampling material: “I need certain sounds in their entirety” (Liechti 2016b).

All of these producers appreciate the possibility in sampling of considering a sound as a whole. Sampling allows them to take into account not just notable parameters like pitch, length, and volume, but further characteristics such as timbre and texture. Genetics & Windsurfing emphasized the ability to combine various sounds through sampling: “Thanks to the sampling method I have sound material formed in different ways in my sound structures.” However, sonic parameters are not the only ones of interest to sampling producers. As Sufyvn illustrated, any other musical parameter could play a key role in the process of selection: “Most of the time, I’m only interested in the technical side of sampling, collecting sounds for only the melodic value, and a certain atmosphere that a sound can carry with it.”

By referring to a “certain atmosphere” Sufyvn links back to the quality of sound. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that the category of “atmosphere” is not only relevant to the contextual approach (narrative perspective), but also to the material approach. It is challenging to clearly attribute it to either the contextual or the material approach. The more concretely a particular atmosphere is defined through contextual associations and/or linguistic descriptions, the more appropriate it might be to describe the sampling reason in question as contextual.

**(b) Innovation: Sampling to Create Specific Tones**

Other producers describe being motivated to sample by the process it enables. They emphasize the possibility of creating some-
thing out of samples, or of adding something new to the composition.Dasychira, for example, explained that “it’s not all samples, but often synths combined with samples layered to create a specific tone.” Similarly, Ian McDonnell is interested in particular tones: “[Samples] can add texture and tone in interesting ways.” Dubokaj pointed to the creation of figures: “[Sampling] is never about quoting another artist. If anything, it brings flavor, or the motivation to create a figure out of it, or to let something develop out of it.” Finally, Brood Ma emphasized the creation of “weird layering or unexpected rhythms.”

It lies in the nature of things that it is difficult to describe what is happening in the material approach, and that these descriptions must remain to a certain degree abstract. Hard-to-grasp factors such as intuition, feeling, and compositional instinct are even more important here than in the contextual approach. It also becomes clear that this second explanation (b, innovation) is somewhat similar to the first (a, inspiration). Once again, we are confronted with the problem of generalization when analyzing reasons for sampling: is a sample chosen because it can do something (create something new within, or add something to, the composition), or because it has a certain quality in its original form? This question might not be answerable, and in any case depends on whether one is focusing on the general or the particular level.

Accidental Sampling: Unintended Consequences or Simple Availability

The third approach in the SSR regards the parameter of chance. It is the only of the four approaches to have been largely ignored by the academic literature so far. I have identified three examples of strategies in which chance plays a role.

(a) Unintended Consequences of the Recording Process

The first strategy has already been described by Paul Harkins—one of the few scholars to have conceptualized accidental sampling. He noted that the Edinburgh-based group Found used sounds that had been “captured accidentally during the recording process.” These “unintended consequences” remained part of the compositions; the producers decided to “reshape or leave intact” these samples “rather than edit [them] out” (Harkins 2010a, 9). Among my own interviewees, hip hop producer Ibaaku provided a similar

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Own translation. Original quote: “Es geht mir nie darum, einen anderen Künstler zu zitieren. Wenn schon einen Flavor, oder eine Motivation, eine Figur zu kreieren daraus, oder etwas daraus heraus entstehen zu lassen.”
example. In his track “Muezzin” (on Alien Cartoon, 2016) he sampled a Muslim call to prayer; accidentally, as became apparent during our conversations:

How did putting this sample into the track come about?

Muezzins are part of the soundscape in my country. In general, they use rather rudimentary equipment: megaphones, bad microphones, or very bad speakers. You can hear them blast from miles away. But I didn’t have to enter a mosque, it came to me naturally because I live in front of a mosque. So, I was deep in the creative process, experimenting, and it came by accident. The call slipped into the recording I was making at one point. I did not notice it at first. But when I heard it, I felt like I had to use it. I like accidents in music. It’s my way of doing things. I love to let space for intuition.

Does the muezzin sample carry a special meaning to you that goes beyond the circumstances of the production?

At the end, there is always a meaning to these kinds of accidents. The muezzin sample fits so well because it sparks the idea of a spiritual ritual, which is the intention behind some of my music. (Liechti 2017f)

Similarly, Matthew Herbert understands the practice of accidental sampling as an important part of his compositional process. In our conversation, he referred to his manifesto “P.C.C.O.M.” (“Personal Contract for the Composition of Music”), written in 2005 and revised in 2011, which lists eleven self-imposed limitations to the selection of his sampling material.

I think nearly every time I sample something by accident and in my manifesto I wrote years ago it says I’m not allowed to edit sounds at the end because that’s where you find extra information. (...) I’m really interested in all those extra noises because it tells you things. It tells you if somebody else was in the room, what the weather was like. I did some recording last week or a couple of weeks ago with a singer and I forgot to turn the heater off, so all the samples have a really strong *rrrrschrrr* [imitating the sound] sound over them and I was like “ah fuck we need do it all over again” and she said—and naturally it should be me saying this—she was like: “No, no, don’t do that because that tells you that it was cold today you know?” You can hear that there were ticking noises in the studio because we were trying to keep warm and of course backed what we’ve done. (...) I had a friend that has a program that goes through it and removes everything unwanted, every plop, crackle, and hiss. And it’s like photoshopping for me. It’s like the death of audio somehow.

Depending on one’s definition of sampling, one might doubt whether these sound clips are samples at all, since they are instantly
recorded and do not stem from a previously existing recording. I
nevertheless include these examples because the external sound
materials are not only considered samples by the producer himself,
but could also be perceived as such by listeners.

(b) Beyond Intention:
Conceptual Noise that Cannot Be Erased

A second form of accidental sampling arises when layers of sound
are sampled without being the explicit focus of the producer’s
sampling act. In other words, a sound might be sampled for a par-
ticular reason, but editing during the production process
might cause other layers of the sound to emerge or be
brought into focus. Producer Ian McDonnell explained the
accidental character behind “Emergo,” from Lakker’s album
Struggle and Emerge (2016):

There’s another example on the Struggle &
Emerge record where we have a kick drum in one
of the tracks, “Emergo.” And the kick drum came
from a wind sound, like a white noise *fffft* [im-
itating the sound], from a recording of somebody
on a boat. And in that wind sound there happened
to be loads and loads of sub bass—it was a rough wind
sound, with a rough mic sound and there were lots of low
frequencies. So, when we were working with that sound
we cut out the high frequencies until I realized it was a re-
ally nicely grounded sound that was quite like a kick drum,
a sub bass heavy kick drum. That then became the kick of
the particular track. It often happens that in the carving
away of certain frequencies something will reveal itself
that wasn’t there initially. Or obviously it was there, you
just didn’t hear it.

Similarly, the producer Yearning Kru acknowledged that

with any sample comes a whole weight of material that
somehow shines through however manipulated the end
result becomes. (...) With sampling it’s more that you have
to deal with the conceptual noise that can’t be erased,
and this leads to a creation beyond what was intended.

Amanda Sewell (2013, 38) discusses a similar case without ex-
plicitly describing it as accidental. In her example, the producer’s
focus was on a melody layer behind some sampled vocals; the vo-
cals nevertheless remained part of the composition.

The degree of chance in these cases is always unclear. Espe-
cially as these sampling strategies are influenced by a producer’s
personal experience and intuition. Producers know which sounds
might offer the chance to uncover “unexpected” sounds; they know
where to expect “conceptual noise” (Yearning Kru). Accordingly,
these strategies could be described as intentionally unintended.
Ian McDonnell expressed it this way: “I've been doing it so long now that I'll often hear a sound [and] I go 'okay, I know there’s more there that I’m not hearing.’”

Yearning Kru pointed to an important question: what comes beyond intention? This question points to a limitation of the SSR. What is missing—because it was not prevalent in the examined material—is a more elaborate discussion of the parameter of affect. As Richard Dyer (2007, 4) wrote, there is a coexistence of “self-consciousness” and “emotional expression.” The SSR primarily explains sampling processes on a self-conscious level. The accidental approach is the only of our categories to acknowledge that sampling reasons might go beyond intention, too.

**What comes beyond intention?**

(c) Sampling Because of Simple Availability

A final accidental sampling strategy entails the sampling of sound simply because it is available. This happens, for example, when a song is sampled just because it was broadcast on the radio at the moment of recording. The particular song is therefore not sampled because it refers to a particular meaning or for its material appearance. It is sampled just because it's there. The track “Mish Aktar” (2016) by Muqata’a offers an example of this strategy:

*The melodic samples I used are from random radio recordings I made during the production of the piece. Local radios in Palestine play a lot of the classical Arabic music “Tarab” and that is what I usually sample, but from vinyl. This time I decided to just turn on the radio and see what sounds I find, and this is what was recorded. So, the actual title of the track and name of artist are unknown to me.*

This form of accidental sampling also covers the accidental aspects identified in the case studies which follow. Three tracks sample material from YouTube (Lara Sarkissian’s “kenats,” Ian McDonnell’s “Perversas,” and James Whipple’s “Methy Imbiß”). The selection of the sampling material was in every case more or less dependent on YouTube’s algorithms. These algorithms ultimately defined what the producer could access when looking for particular material (“kenats”), or when spontaneously browsing the video platform (“Perversas” and “Methy Imbiß”). One could argue that chance is not at play here, as these algorithms are programmed and well-defined. However, I still consider this chance because the producer could not foresee what material they would encounter.
Procedural Sampling: Conceptual, Utilitarian, and Social Aspects

This final sampling approach is an amalgamation of various reasons for sampling which can be categorized as neither contextual nor material. More than the meaning or the quality of the sampled sounds, these sampling motivations touch on the characteristics, possibilities, or consequences that the process of sampling as such enables or implies. I have identified three main strands to this approach, covering conceptual, utilitarian, and social aspects.

(a) Conceptual Sampling

In my conversation with electronic noise duo Naked, they described sampling as a means to an end: “Our approach to sampling is functional, as a means to an end to portray our own ideas, or to paint our canvas. In a time of absolute political and social chaos, destruction as a means of creation feels essential.” Sampling, for Naked, is a conceptual need: they sample because they see an essential importance in the act of destruction, which is inherent in every act of sampling. Sampling allows Naked to directly react to the political and social circumstances they live in. This motivation does not explain—at least not completely—why they have chosen a particular sample. It must instead be understood as a motivation on a general level. Naked sample because it allows them to conceptually integrate the act of destruction into their compositional practice.

Dasychira described a similar sampling motivation. Instead of reflecting a sociopolitical context, he sees sampling, with its heterogeneous character, as representing a personal mindset: “I get to create a multi-dimensional sonic context that feels like the most accurate representation of my creative headspace.” Even more generally, bod [AHQ] pointed to the democratic potential of the production technique: “If me of all people can do that, then it’s proof that anyone can do anything, that you don’t have to be a suburban kid who grew up and started making music to be cool. I want to use this power for good, I guess.”

(b) Utilitarian Sampling

Another strand of procedural sampling is utilitarian in nature. Joanna Demers (2010, 52) has previously introduced this label, which in my usage can encompass a broad range of different motivations. While Gan Gah was the only of my interviewees to directly refer to the comfort offered by sampling—“It makes the production job a
little easier & facilitates the creative process”—other producers offered more specific reasons. Drew Daniel, from the sampling duo Matmos, mentioned his own lack of talent: “For me, the answer to the question ‘why sampling?’ is my incompetence, my musical incompetence. (...) It’s a workaround for your own lack of talent or lack of musical ability.”

In short, sampling allows producers to work with whatever instrument they want, regardless of whether they can play it or not. The same is true for the use of one’s own voice, as I will explain in the concluding chapter. Sampling also solves problems of access, as the case study of Lara Sarkissian will illustrate. The producer reflected: “I tend to sample a lot of sounds of instruments that I do not have access to, or [to] people who play them.”

Moreover, sampling abolishes economic barriers in musical composition. Sampling to save money—one no longer has to pay a whole orchestra—used to be a key motivation, at least in the early days of sampling, when Goodwin (1990) developed his thoughts on the technique. Since sampling has become a ubiquitous production practice, such motivations likely play a subordinate role. The only of my interviewees to cite this reason was Brood Ma: “I feel that sampling is often the fastest, most economical way to communicate an idea.” Today, the relation between economic cost and the possibilities of sampling might even have reversed: following the first legal verdicts on copyright infringement, it has in some cases become more expensive to clear a sample than to order an exact replay of it.16

However, while sampling offers more freedom to the producer—in terms of musical ability, access, and budget—it can also be used to limit production possibilities. In digital production, the possibilities for music producers have become almost limitless. Looking for forms of limitation has thus become an important compositional step for many producers. Vika Kirchenbauer samples exclusively from a defined pool of material, and James Whipple uses samples as a “compositional crutch.” Often, Whipple starts new compositions on top of old projects, sampling to avoid having to begin a new project with carte blanche: “It’s hard for me to write on silence. I have to have something in the background to write on top of.” At a certain point in the production process, he then discards these samples.

Similar strategies have been described by Harkins (2010a, 10) as an “additive approach” and by Morey as “start with a sample, then discard it” (Morey and McIntyre 2014, 53). I also observed this strategy in Dubokaj’s production studio. When we looked for a sample that he thought he had sampled in a particular track, we discovered that the sample had, after a certain point, been excluded.
from the project. However, the sample audibly influenced a new, self-played and self-recorded instrumental pattern (Liechti 2017a). Tomutonttu uses samples in a similar way:

Starting with samples is a fruitful way to end up in new musical situations that I would never arrive to by sitting at a piano for example. (...) A selection of sound is encouraged to inspire something new. The method is experimental so a lot of shit gets thrown away because of a lack of substance.

These producers are aware that the process of sampling offers them new, unexpected sounds. (I described this reason for sampling as “innovation” in the previous section on the material approach.) They are thus forced to find creative ways to deal with these “new” sounds, as Yearning Kru explains: “The reason I like using samples and certain processes is because there are things you can’t remove, that you just have to deal with” (Yearning Kru in Simshäuser 2017, 42).

(c) Social Aspects

A final sampling motivation that I include in the procedural approach is shaped by social factors. Mauro Guz Bejar, for example, considers sampling a “way to collaborate or mixing [sic] with people.” For him, sampling “feels like collaborating and listening to other opinions.” When conceptualized in this way, sampling reads like a counter strategy to the social isolation that laptop producers likely face given the isolated nature of their production process.

I have included the procedural approach in the SSR to draw attention to more general reasons for sampling that do not, by themselves, sufficiently explain the sampling of particular sound material. The motivations listed above describe a view on sampling that is interested in the enabling, facilitating, or limiting effects it brings to the process of composition.

Why do producers in experimental electronica sample? This chapter has offered some preliminary answers to this question. With the SSR, it is possible to display the complex interplay of various levels and perspectives regarding the motivations, motives, and intentions behind sampling processes. Based on data from my fieldwork I have outlined two main approaches to sampling.

In the contextual approach (red), a sample is selected because of the extra-musical references and associations it carries. In the material approach (yellow), a sample is selected for its material appearance, its aesthetics, or its musical character. The first is driven
by meaning, while the second is driven by sound. Two further approaches complement this discussion of sampling reasons. The accidental approach (green) illustrates the often-overlooked role of chance in the creative work of sampling artists, and the procedural approach (blue) acknowledges more general motivations behind sampling that serve, at least partly, as valid explanations for particular sampling strategies.

These different levels challenge the existing discussion around reasons for sampling. On a broader level, one can explain why a producer is sampling at all, while on a more specific level, one can illustrate why a producer has selected a particular sound. The procedural approach in the SSR allows for the discussion of the first, general level, while the other approaches and perspectives are primarily focused on the second, specific level. In the three general fields of reasons for sampling (inspiration, communication, and content), I have introduced another helpful categorization to explain general contextual reasons for sampling.

Furthermore, I have specified five particular perspectives (active, narrative, neutral, personal, and strategic) and one sub-perspective (solidary) in the contextual approach. With these categories, the SSR allows for the simultaneous display of various reasons for sampling within a given analysis. This takes into account that there is rarely only one determining reason behind a sampling process. Reasons for sampling must be discussed as a compound of multiple, intertwined motivations, motives, and intentions. The following section, on the five case studies, will offer just such in-depth analysis of reasons for sampling.

The model and its categories are based on qualitative research. They should not be considered exhaustive. It was my aim to develop a model which convincingly explained all reasons for sampling from my research data. Consequently, this does not mean that there are no further conceivable reasons for sampling. However, I have selectively tested my model with examples beyond the field of experimental electronica to prove its applicability for sample-based music in general.

As a final example, I want to exploratively discuss a sampling strategy from the dub/dancehall crew Seekersinternational (SKRSINTL). Their case suggests how the SSR could be productively applied to the analysis of sampling strategies. SKRSINTL described one of their main sampling motivations as the contextualization of sound. They commented on their strategy of sampling living room conversations taken from “various movie background sounds”:

*We have taken such types of “background” sounds from a few different movies and YouTube videos to give the music some grounding or context within a living world, whether*
real or manufactured – or confounding one from another. (...) The basic idea is to give the tracks added depth by giving the listeners a hint of a world where this music is actually played, discussed, and listened to by people, blasted in cars and shop fronts; as opposed to music that just exists within itself, in some isolated vacuum of one’s imagination, devoid of human interaction and intimacy with the environment. (...) It’s all about relationships in the broad sense of the word; we wanted to also conjure the place, space, world where this music exists and is a part of.

The crew sampled prerecorded music not from the released recordings themselves, but from YouTube videos in which these recordings were played in a social context. It was their aim to include these contexts in the music. The contextual approach, along with both the active and narrative perspectives, serve as the most suitable categories for this process. The perspective is active because the producers aimed to send a message to listeners—“giving the listeners a hint”—and narrative because the producers wanted to craft a particular atmosphere—“conjure the place, space, world.”

At least the material approach is also at play. In an online interview, the crew emphasized the importance of “the feel” when it comes to sampling:

*The main thing we keep an ear out for is FEEL. The certain feel and context of a sample I think is our priority over straight phonetics or semantics, as far as vocal samples go. For example, when searching for the word-sample “murder”, sampling that same word as reported in the nightly news is completely different from sampling a soundsystem deejay toasting “musical murda!” in a dance; the feel and thus the vibe it will convey will be completely different.* (SKRSINTL in Ableton 2018)

Obviously, this category of “the feel” refers to contextual and material aspects. However, the particular sound and sonic quality of the samples seems to be key. SKRSINTL’s sampling strategy could also be explained with neutral, personal, or strategic aspects, as well as through perspectives related to the other approaches—for example, the accidental approach plays a role, insofar as discovering the sampling material was dependent on the YouTube algorithm.