

Part 2

Case Studies

Introduction: Five Sampling Strategies in Experimental Electronica

In this part of the book, I illustrate five distinct sampling strategies devised by producers of experimental electronica. The musicians and producers Vika Kirchenbauer (COOL FOR YOU), Lara Sarkissian, Mauro Guz Bejar (Moro), Ian McDonnell (Eomac), and James Whipple (M.E.S.H.) either process political sound material or use the production technique of sampling to deal with political questions and issues (politicization of sampling material). Their strategies range from obvious political concepts (Vika Kirchenbauer) to the concealed processing of political sound material (James Whipple). The reasons behind these sampling strategies cover most of the contextual perspectives outlined in the spider of sampling reasons (SSR), from active and neutral to personal and narrative. Regarding the sampling material, the tracks process previously unreleased music (Lara Sarkissian and Vika Kirchenbauer), media material from the video platform YouTube (Ian McDonnell and James Whipple), and environmental sound from an online sound database (Mauro Guz Bejar).

In these five case studies, I attempt to enter the “black box pop,” a term used by popular music scholars to indicate the impenetrability of much popular music (e.g. Helms and Phleps 2012). The following chapters will thus offer a rare perspective on the often-concealed processes of production. In this way I aim to contribute to a better understanding of popular music’s modus operandi.

The case studies are discussed in the order of the degree of visibility of their sampling processes. I start with the most obvious and end with the most concealed. The first example, COOL FOR YOU’s “STABILIZED, YES!” is a contribution to an active political agenda. The producer Vika Kirchenbauer samples a religious folk tune from a U.S. tradition (Sacred Harp) with connections to colonial history. By repitching the harmonies and chopping the sample into dozens of sample-clips, Kirchenbauer aims to criticize harmonies as colonizers.

In the second track, “kenats,” Lara Sarkissian uses sampling to produce a political commentary that challenges traditional gender roles in Armenian culture. In this case, sampling functions as a tool of appropriation: a sound and a particular style of playing, which would not otherwise be accessible in the diaspora, are appropriated and sampled. This sampling strategy is shaped by both a personal and an active perspective.

In “Libres,” Mauro Guz Bejar samples sound material that is “non-contextual” in the first instance. By adding a political storyboard to the track and by applying a clave rhythm pattern to the

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sample—which, for the producer, is politically coded as an expression of resistance—he uses sampling as a modular construction system for political messages.

The next track, “Perversas” by Ian McDonnell, contains a more concealed sample. McDonnell processes material from a video documenting people who maintain sexual relationships with animals (bestiality), with the principal aim of adding a particular atmosphere to the track. This sampling strategy is shaped by a non-political approach, but it raises politically relevant questions on voyeurism and the treatment of social taboos.

Finally, the last example, “Methy Imbiß” by James Whipple, illustrates that politics can be materially present in popular music without being obviously audible or visible. The processing of video footage from the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine remains almost completely concealed for the listener. This sampling strategy is deeply personal, reflecting the producer’s lived experience.

Each analysis follows the same structure. To explain these steps, I adopt terminology introduced by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, based on thoughts by Jean Molino. In his seminal book on musical semiology, Nattiez emphasized that “the *essence* of a musical work is at once its genesis, its organization, and the way it is perceived” (Nattiez 1990, ix; italics original). He illustrated that the analysis of music takes place simultaneously on three “semiological levels”: poietic, neutral, and esthetic. The poietic dimension describes the process of creation, while the esthetic focuses on the reception. The neutral dimension, finally, represents the trace that the musical object has “physically and materially” left. In art music, this would be the score; in popular music, in most cases the recording.¹ The analyses in the following sections mainly switch between poietic and neutral perspectives. The esthetic is only present insofar as my own reading of these tracks is a form of reception as well. However, if we consider an analysis only complete when all three levels are discussed, then we would still have to expand this study with the esthetic perspective.

Each chapter starts with an introduction to the producer and a detailed description of the sampling process in focus, subdivided into sections discussing the sampling source and the processing of the sampling material. This first part aims to describe in detail *what* has been sampled and *how* it has been sampled on a more technical level. This section also contains further background information that helps to contextualize the sampled material or other aspects related to the production process. These steps are mainly descriptive and thus belong to Nattiez’ neutral level.

1 Nattiez developed his concept on the basis of art music. However, from my point of view, it can be applied to the analysis of popular music as well. Popular music is also shaped by dimensions of production (poietic) and reception (esthetic). However, due to the strong concept of the work, the neutral level might be more valued in art music.

The second part focuses on the analysis of reasons for sampling and the sample's visibility. It follows three main steps: first, the examination of *why* particular material has been sampled. This will be discussed with the help of the SSR. The second step clarifies, as much as possible, the attitude of the producer towards their sampling material. Some aspects discussed here might have already appeared in the previous step; I consider it important to approach and summarize them from a further perspective. Discussing reasons for sampling alone does not necessarily reveal a producer's attitudes towards the processed material. The third and last step involves, once again, shifting to another perspective. It focuses on the visibility of the sampling process by applying the fader of visibility FOV. This section, as well as the following, is more of an explanation of character and thus belongs to Nattiez' poietic level.

All insights gained into the sampling strategy under question will inform the last, concluding part of each analysis. In this section, I will verbalize each sampling strategy in a condensed form. I will focus on the "seismographic substance" of each track and discuss the question of what this case study tells us about the world and what insights its analysis affords. Moreover, I will discuss questions that point to a more general view on the production technique of sampling. Finally, the conclusion critically focuses on aspects that remain open and that should be a subject of further study. The structure of the concluding section will vary for each case study.