9

"Perversas" by Eomac: Depoliticizing Sound

Instead of politicizing non-contextual sound, this sampling process depoliticizes highly contextual media material.

The musician behind the alias Eomac is Ian McDonnell (*1979), an Irish-born electronic music producer and DJ.[1] Beyond his solo projects Eomac and EeOo, McDonnell performs and releases music as a part of the duos Lakker (since 2003) and noeverything (since 2016), and runs the label Eotrax. The producer took piano lessons from the age of six until his early twenties. He then studied music and music technology at Trinity College Dublin, gradually shifting his focus to electronic music. His early productions were shaped by hip hop and drum & bass, before he became influenced by techno and increasingly focused on experimental approaches.

After moving from Dublin, Ireland, to Berlin, Germany, in 2014, McDonnell felt part of the Berlin techno scene, even though he considered (and still does) his music to be "kind of different sounding to a lot of the music within that scene." He stated that he currently sees himself as "part of a wider electronic music scene." In recent years, McDonnell has earned his living from music. He produces music on his laptop in his home studio or, occasionally, while traveling to one of his regular live performances and DJ sets. McDonnell's music is distributed digitally (Bandcamp, SoundCloud, Spotify) and on vinyl.

1 Unless otherwise stated, this chapter is based on email conversations that took place between January 1, 2017 and February 15, 2017; one interview in Berlin on January 24, 2018; and one interview via Skype on December 19, 2018.

When researching tracks for this study, my interest in McDonnell's productions was aroused early on, as he is involved in a number of projects with a particular focus on sampling. With Lakker, he has made an album exclusively using samples from the archive of the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision (*Struggle & Emerge*, 2016), while as Eomac, he has made an album processing traditional sound material from the "Arab world" (*Bedouin Trax*, 2016).[2] I once asked McDonnell about other tracks of his containing samples from external media material. In response, he mentioned the track "Perversas," which was—at that time—titled differently ("We're not Supposed to Live this Way") and still unreleased.

Compared with the other case studies, this track is the most distant from the prevailing sound aesthetics of experimental electronica. It lacks the usual cuts and fragmentation, abrasive sounds, and atonality. Instead, the track adheres to a loop-based and stable rhythmic structure. Although the kick drum does not play a four-on-the-floor beat, this conventional techno pattern shines through; first without being present, and later (from 01:00) via a percussive sound resembling a hi-hat. Hence, "Perversas" is not representative of what I describe as experimental electronica. Among McDonnell's productions, other projects and tracks can be better described as experimental electronic popular music. However, I chose "Perversas" because I was generally interested in McDonnell's sampling approach, and the sampling strategy behind the track reveals an approach to sampling that substantially differs from the other case studies.

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Three features illustrate these differences: (1) the layers of meaning of the source material are of limited significance to the producer. (2) There is no overt political intention behind the track, unlike in the three case studies analyzed so far. (3) The source material reflects my broad understanding of "the political" as a signifier of the social. To elaborate: I do not only consider something "political" if it refers directly to public expressions of opinion (e.g. protests) or the day-to-day business of political parties, parliaments, and governments. In my understanding, "the political" refers to issues that are relevant or urgent for a specific group of people and/or that are publicly debated. In the present case it is the topic of bestiality—sexual intercourse between humans and animals—that is debated. This topic can be considered "political" in a broad sense, as it represents a social taboo.

→ Chapter 2

In this analysis, I will examine the mechanisms and reasons behind a sampling strategy that clearly avoids taking on any political character. This analysis will discuss the function of such a sample and of the technique of sampling as such. It will present a sampling

2 I consciously use the term "Arab world" here without further specification because it was used by the producer himself in our conversations as well as in the press releases of the *Bedouin Trax* album.

strategy whose primary concern is the concealment of the processed sources.

The track "Perversas" was released during my research, on the compilation *Elephant Road* from London-based label Candela Rising, on April 13, 2017. I have no access to statistics regarding views and sales. However, the little publicity the compilation has received, and the likes (26) and views (1,177, as of July 2021) of a non-official YouTube upload of the track, allow me to suggest that the track has had a limited reach.

Background: Bestiality and Zoophilia as Social Taboos

If one only wants to understand the reasons behind McDonnell's sampling strategy, the layers of meaning found in the sample's source context are not of primary importance. However, a few introductory remarks are still needed in order to trace and discuss the socio-political mechanisms behind the strategy. The sample in question consists of external media material, specifically an excerpt from a video of a young couple talking about their relationship and their shared sexual preference for animals, especially horses (xoffender45 2007). This sexual practice is called bestiality or zoophilia. The terms are sometimes used interchangeably; in academic discourse, bestiality is understood to refer to sexual activity between animals and humans, while zoophilia describes the sexual fixation on, or attraction towards, animals (Ranger and Fedoroff 2014; Kahn 2007). Colin J. Williams and Martin S. Weinberg have pointed out that academic research on sexuality gives only marginal attention to these practices. They state that research on the topic "simply notes that the behavior is rare and confined to certain groups (...), although the practice is said to occur throughout history" (Williams and Weinberg 2003, 524).

Today, the practice is prohibited in most countries. The first two decades of this century even saw an increase in the passing of new laws against bestiality (Wikipedia 2019c; Shir-Vertesh 2013, 162). Dafna Shir-Vertesh (2013, 161) writes that "most societies view sexual relations with animals as a cardinal sin or perversion." This understanding does not correspond to approaches in the psychological and medical fields, where the practice is only defined as a diagnosable mental disorder when accompanied by "distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning," as can be read in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5 2013, 705).

In public, however, the topic is rarely discussed. In her pioneering research on zoophilia in Israel, Shir-Vertesh (2013, 162) emphasizes that there is "no public awareness that sexual relations with animals are more than a rare oddity." In her fieldwork, she was confronted

with a set of basic reactions. It is worth quoting her conclusions zat length, as they illustrate how the phenomenon is treated in a particular context:

> *The various Israeli settings I explored demonstrate that zoophilia is one "different thing" that people in Israel, on the one hand, are not willing to accept, and on the other, find captivating. At first glance, zoophilia does not "officially exist" in Israel and is rarely discussed. This silence can be seen as a major comment on the unacceptability of these actions. When the silence is broken, mention of human-animal sex draws strong interest and even stronger reactions. The intense, uncensored, reactions to zoophilia indicate that while most Israelis prefer to ignore the phenomenon, when directly faced with it they find it strikes a chord. Their reactions fall into the three main categories of humor, disgust, and lashing out. (167)*

Although grounded in another context, Shir-Vertesh's findings will be helpful when analyzing the producer's attitude towards this topic, and when developing some concluding thoughts on the case study. In summary, these reactions—between ignorance and fascination—are typical of the treatment of social taboos. Shir-Vertesh quotes Andrea Beetz, who considers bestiality and zoophilia "one of the last persevering taboos" in most societies (161). It is considered threatening to address social taboos proactively, even in research, as Shir-Vertesh demonstrates. Hence, the anthropologist analyzes zoophilia as a threat to the dominance of the human species: "Zoophilia is an ultimate transgression of human boundaries, and as such defies the very cultural perceptions of 'who we are', and what it means to be human in Israel" (170).

This view corresponds with that of Christie Davies (1982, 1060), who analyzes the maintaining of sexual taboos, such as those around homosexuality, bestiality, and transvestism, as a longstanding and successful effort by Western societies to "establish and defend strong ethnic, religious, or institutional boundaries." Through the establishment of social taboos, Davies states, the leaders of groups or institutions—such as the military or the Catholic Church—can constitute their own identity. By defining which sexual practices are not accepted, they draw the line between a group and outsiders. In other words, sexual taboos define who belongs to a group and who does not.

It is not the practice as such that is political so much as the debate—or rather the lack of debate—around it.

These discussions illustrate that it is not the practice as such that is political so much as the debate—or rather the lack of debate—around it. By processing material related to a social taboo, Ian McDonnell's sampling strategy inevitably becomes part of this "debate."

Sample Source

McDonnell recorded the sample from the video platform YouTube. The source video is 4 minutes and 10 seconds long, bears the title "Horse Humper Bestiality Documentary," and was uploaded by the user xoffender45 on January 8, 2007. The video is categorized in the "Comedy" section of the video platform. As of July 2021, the clip has had 581,987 views, 1,073 comments, 786 likes, and 848 dislikes. These high numbers characterize the clip as a popular and viral video.[3]

The clip shows an outdoor scene in which a couple (Can and Ellie) are looking for firewood. They sit down by a campfire and speak about how they met and their experiences of sexual intercourse with horses. Figure 9.1 shows two screenshots of the low-quality video, taken from YouTube. Beyond the voices of the two protagonists, the video's audio track contains some soundscape noises in the background and, at the beginning, a few repeating, dissonant organ tones. Although not sampled in "Perversas," these tones—deriving from the soundtrack of the documentary from which the video was originally taken—might have influenced the producer's perception of the video and his association of it with a particular atmosphere, as I will explain later.

Figure 9.1: YouTube screenshots of the sample source of "Perversas" (xoffender45 2007)

The beginning of the video (in which a narrator says, "She did eventually meet Can") indicates that the clip is an excerpt. The watermark in the video's bottom right corner suggests that the uploader, xoffender45, must have copied the video from the website eBaum's World (ebaumsworld.com). eBaum's World presents entertaining and humorous web content uploaded by its users, such as memes, images, viral videos, and articles. The video in question was uploaded to eBaum's World on January 4, 2007, with the title "Horse Humper." It is an excerpt from a 2004 documentary on Zoophilia, *Animal Passions*, written and directed by Christopher Spencer.

3 In the course of this project, the views increased from 521,000 (March 2018) to 556,000 (June 2019) to 581,987 (July 2021). Although new comments were added in the period in question, the total number of comments decreased from 1,202 (March 2018) to 1,138 (October 2018), raised again to 1,153 (June 2019), and finally decreased to 1,073 (July 2021). The most plausible explanation for these changes is that some comments were deleted by YouTube due to prohibited content (e.g. homophobia, hate, or violence).

Sample Processing

In “Perversas,” Ian McDonnell sampled a short excerpt of nine seconds from the YouTube video (2:34 to 2:43, sample-clip 2). The excerpt contains the woman’s stuttering voice explaining her sexual practices with her miniature stallion: “Uhm… I li… I like to… to… suck on him… orally. Uh… and… he exp… especially enjoys that.” This passage is presumably, for most viewers, one of the most disturbing moments of the entire video. It summarizes Ellie’s sexual preference in one short sentence. However, McDonnell uses sample-clip 2 only once. The dominant sample in the track (sample-clip 1) is a shorter version (2:34 to 2:37 in the video) of the initial sample-clip.

→ Figure 9.3, highlighted in blue

→ Figure 9.3, highlighted in green

Sample-clip 1 is three seconds long and contains only the first part of Ellie’s quote: “Uhm… I li… I like to… to.” Isolated in this manner, the meaning of the source context cannot be understood without further contextual information. I assume that McDonnell cut the initial sample according to the fixed length of the bars—the track is in a 4/4-time signature and the overall bpm is 129, meaning sample-clip 1 corresponds to the length of two bars.

Figure 9.2 and Figure 9.3 show the processing of the sample in “Perversas.” The first figure is a screenshot from the track’s Live project, containing the audio track with the YouTube sample. McDonnell labeled the sample itself as “HorseInterview_WRONG” and the respective audio track as “hORSE.”

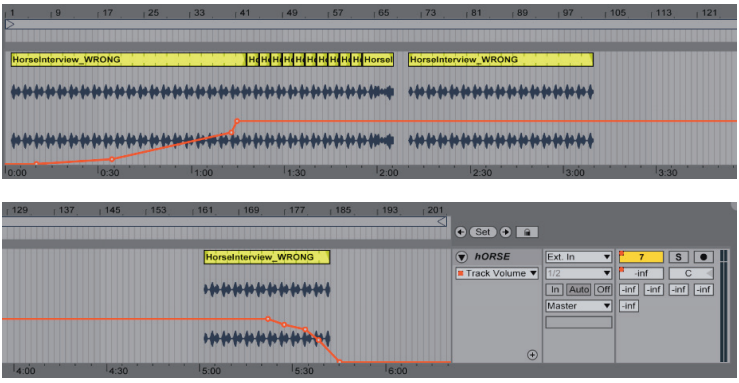

Figure 9.2: Sample processing in “Perversas” (screenshots from Live)

Figure 9.3 displays a transcript of “Perversas” with a focus on both sample-clips. They are represented as they appear in the Live file. McDonnell deployed two techniques of repetition: copy-pasting the samples (bars 43–62) and looping them (bars 2–42, 71–102, 163–185). The rows below the sample represent the other audio tracks in the Live project, containing the rhythm section and some ambient sounds. I have indicated McDonnell’s labels for the respective track or track group in brackets.

This can also be seen in the Live screenshot in Figure 9.2. Sample-clips that have been copied and pasted are margined by vertical black lines, while looped sections appear without lines in the yellow title row.

Three shades of gray further show various levels of intensity. The kick drum consists of different layers that are not always played simultaneously. The hi-hat accents shift from falling on all quarter

notes to falling on all eighth notes. Finally, the drone sounds are present throughout the track, changing their dynamics significantly.

Both figures illustrate that the sample mainly appears in the track's intro and outro sections. The sample is also present in the first section of the main part (bars 71–102), which is the first of two climaxes in the track. The second climax occurs at bars 143–162. Both climaxes are announced by a breakdown section.

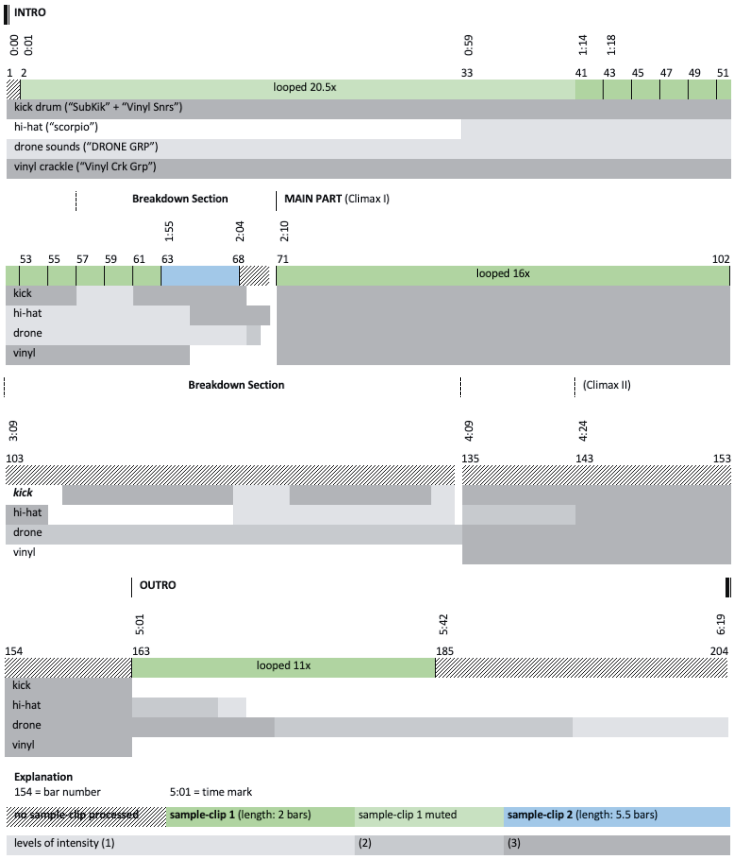

Figure 9.3: Transcript focusing on processing of the YouTube sample in "Perversas"

The structure of the track is typical for electronic music: the various layers are introduced one after another. The track starts with the kick drum and some vinyl crackle, followed by the hi-hat in bar 33 and the vocal sample in bar 41. Although the drone sounds are present from the beginning, their intensity is slowly increased until the climax at bar 71. The first breakdown section (bars 57–70) is reached through a consistent building up of the track's layers. The full-length sample (sample-clip 2), presented for the first and only time, is a significant part of this section.

Although it appears in fewer than half of the bars in the track (82 of 204), the vocal sample is prominent in "Perversas." This is primarily due to its different standing compared to the other sounds processed in the track, which are either part of the rhythm or treated as ambient sounds. Moreover, the presentation of the full-length sample directs all attention onto it, as it is followed by the track's

only full breakdown (bar 70, on beat number four).

The sample progressively loses its significance, being used less and less as the track progresses. McDonnell used at least four other methods to further conceal the sample towards the track's end. (1) He sampled a part of the YouTube video that is of limited comprehensibility (the woman stutters; the sentence is only a fragment). (2) The producer manipulates the sample with a range of effects. Figure 9.4 and Table 9.1 show the effect chain that McDonnell applied to the vocal sample. With all effects enabled, it is impossible to understand the sampled voice. All that remains are its contours; the attacks of the syllables build a rhythmic element rather than a semantic unit. McDonnell described the technique as follows:

The attacks of the sampled syllables build a rhythmic element rather than a semantic unit.

> *I didn't remove it [the sample] absolutely. It's kind of distorted and hidden in the texture of the track so that you can't hear what they are saying anymore but you can still hear the kind of contour of the voice, you know as if they are metrical *M m m m m*—it sounds like humming. So, they are still there but you can't hear the really disturbing words.*

Figure 9.4: Effect chain applied to YouTube sample in "Perversas" (screenshots from Live)

The next means of concealing the sample appears towards the end of the track. (3) Here, the drone sounds gradually come to the foreground, finally superseding the vocal sample in the last looped section of the sample (bars 163–85). (4) In this last section, the producer alters the volume of the audio track along with a few effect parameters. Figure 9.5 shows how McDonnell manipulated the audio track volume and the effects Simple Delay (parameters Dry/Wet and Feedback), Reverb (Dry/Wet), and Auto Filter (LFO Amount, Frequency) in the aforementioned bars, thereby concealing the sample further. (The same figure also shows how the volume of the sample track is decreased towards the track's end.)

No.	Effect	Impact	Selected Settings
1	Auto Filter	cuts low frequencies	Filter Cutoff: 196 Hz Resonance/Bandwith: 0.75
2	Simple Delay	repeats the audio signal with a delay	Delay Time Left: 4 16th notes Delay Time Right: 6 16th notes
3	Compressor	a sidechain compressor links the voice sample with the hi-hat; on each hi-hat accent the signal of the sample is compressed	Threshold: -41.1 dB Ratio: 3.66: 1
4	Reverb	adds some reverb to the signal	Pre-delay: 2.50 ms Size: 254.85 Decay Time: 6.24 s
5	Compressor	creates a more consistent volume by compressing the audio signal	Threshold: -50.9 dB Ratio: 5.57: 1
6	Auto Filter	cuts high frequencies	Filter Cutoff: 877 Hz Resonance/Bandwith: 1.23
7	EQ Eight	another low-cut filter	Frequency: 152 Hz

Table 9.1: Impact and settings of the effects applied to the main sample in "Perversas"

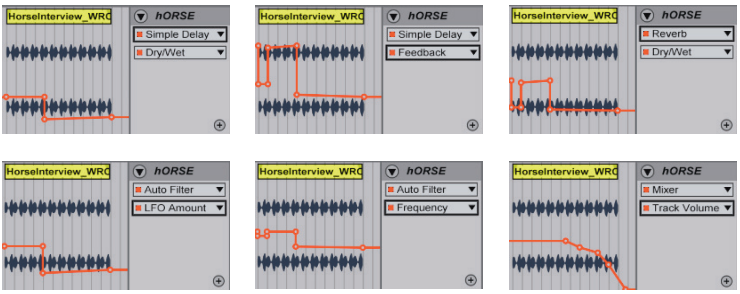

Figure 9.5: Altered effects and volume of sample in bars 163–85 in "Perversas" (screenshots from Live)

Just as the sample becomes more and more concealed as the track progresses, a similar process shapes the various steps in the process of sampling more broadly. This can be seen, for instance, in the first looped section of the sample (bars 2–41). According to Figure 9.3 and the Live file, the sample is looped here 20.5 times. However, as its volume only rises slowly, the sample remains inaudible until bar 41 in the mastered track. This long, muted section of sample-clip 1 can be seen as a leftover from an earlier stage of production, where the sample was more prominent earlier on. This shows McDonnell's intention to increasingly obfuscate the sample during the production process. I will comment on this later.

Sample Visibility and Reasons for Sampling

(a) Reasons for Sampling

This case study represents a sampling strategy that does not place much emphasis on the (extra-musical) meaning of the sampled material. This is shown by the SSR below: the fewer areas filled out on the left side of the diagram, the lower the significance of the extra-musical to the sampling strategy in question.

Nevertheless, I have identified aspects of all four approaches in McDonnell's sampling. The most significant category is the narrative perspective within the contextual approach. Put simply, McDonnell sampled the YouTube video to convey a particular atmosphere. In our conversations, he repeatedly emphasized this intention: "It was to convey this feeling of uneasiness and discomfort. I think that was the main kind of intention with that."

McDonnell sampled the YouTube video to convey a particular atmosphere.

In order to understand the process of sample selection, it is worth looking at the entire production process, which took considerable time. According to the oldest time stamps on some of the Live files and his own statements, McDonnell started working on the project in 2010. The time stamp on the sample file (November 20, 2009) indicates that the sample was first recorded even earlier. It took McDonnell seven years to finally release "Perversas," in early 2017. Accordingly, there were two moments of selection: an initial one, when the producer watched the YouTube video and recorded the sample; and a second, when the producer selected the sample material for processing. McDonnell recalled the moment when he initially watched the video:

> *I clicked on it and… to check it out… it is an interesting topic, human sexuality, in all its various forms and perversions—it's interesting and this was like "Okay, I gotta hear what these people are saying," and then… yeah just the… the nature of what they're saying and the sound of their voices, well everything about it is really disturbing and so I thought yeah, this… this could work for… for a sample in something.*

McDonnell recorded the sample in Live and saved it in a folder on his computer. There was no aim to sample the material in a specific track. He merely stored it for potential later use, a practice that I call bookmarking of sampling material (this represents the storing stage within the process of sampling). McDonnell confirmed that he often pursues this practice, though in the end he only processes a fraction of the stored material: "I rarely use them, but I want to have them just in case they work for a track… So, there's that aspect of hearing and putting it aside for later for that might work

→ Figure 2.1

for something." This case study thus illustrates that the mere act of browsing through YouTube has become an integral part of the process of music-making (see also a similar conclusion drawn in the interlude of this book later). This reflects the incorporation of the stage of research and active and passive listening into the process of sampling.

→ Chapter 11

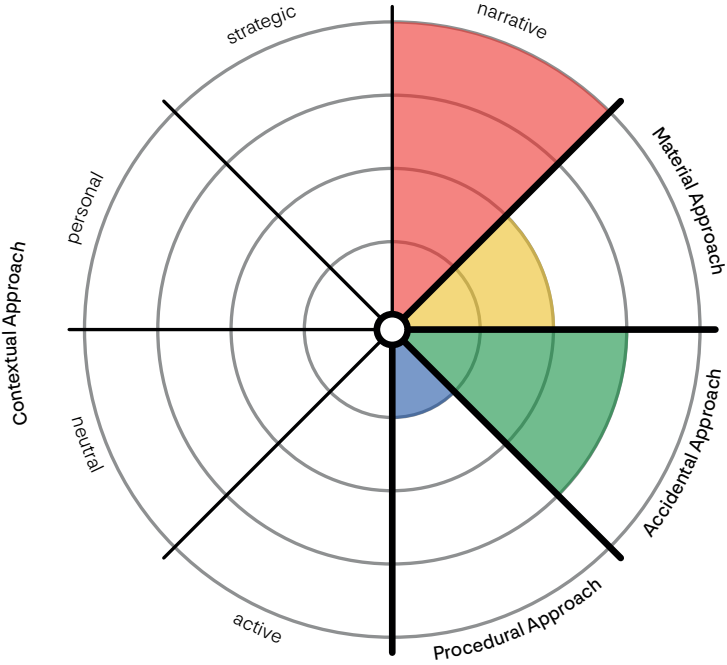

Figure 9.6: SSR: reasons for sampling in "Perversas"

When starting to work on "Perversas," McDonnell first focused on the drone sounds. While working with them, he remembered the YouTube sample and thus arrived at the second moment of selection:

> *I think it was these [drone sounds] I initially started working with. They have this kind of eerie, strange to me atmosphere as well. When I was working on these, I thought of the sample that I had bookmarked, and thought that conversation would work well with [this] really strange sound/drone.*
>
> *Those vocal samples that were eventually used in "Perversas" just kind of fit the mood of the track that I was already working on.*

It was a particular atmosphere or "mood" that McDonnell intended to evoke with the track. He wanted to intensify this atmosphere through sampling and felt that the YouTube sample fit the desired atmosphere. In our conversations, he described the atmosphere as eerie, strange, disturbing, weird, uncomfortable, and dark. At this point, the original meaning of the sample material—a woman

talking about her sexual preferences towards a miniature stallion—had already shifted to the background. The particular content of the material was no longer significant so much as its association with an abstract "strange and eerie" feeling.

This feeling still connects to the extra-musical. It is questionable whether McDonnell would have related the video with this atmosphere without further context—for example, if the same couple had talked about other preferences or actions not connected with a controversial topic such as bestiality. More fundamentally, relating a sound to an atmosphere is an act of linking the musical with the extra-musical. Hence, I interpret this sampling intention as primarily contextual.

The particular content of the material was no longer significant so much as its association with an abstract "strange and eerie" feeling.

Still, it cannot be denied that the material approach is also relevant to some extent. McDonnell repeatedly stated that "there was something about the tone and inflection of their voices that was equally disturbing," and that they "fit with the tone of the track." But there is no sharp distinction between the material and the contextual here. I assume that this particular "tone" or "inflection" is intrinsically tied to extra-musical information from the source video. In other words: the content of the source video affected how McDonnell perceived the tone of the voices.

Another element, beyond the content of the conversation, might have affected McDonnell's perception of the video: the background music in its first 30 seconds. These repeating, dissonant organ-like sounds—belonging to the soundtrack of the documentary from which the source material was extracted—might have been a precondition for perceiving the video as "strange and eerie." Although this is just an assumption that cannot be verified, I suppose that McDonnell might have selected the sample not primarily for its content, but because he found a particular sonic quality in the sample that he was looking for.

When discussing the act of sampling with McDonnell, he emphasized the significance of the material approach for his sampling practice in general:

> *I pretty much sample anything that has (to my ears) an interesting sonic quality. I'm not overly precious about the source.*
>
> *I also often record vocal snippets of interesting or unusual topics from YouTube etc., and sometimes use them in tracks. They can add texture and tone in interesting ways.*

In other words, when sampling, McDonnell's focus lies on the sonic and thus material qualities of the sample material in general, such as tone and texture.

The use of this particular vocal sample in the track was also—at least to some extent—determined by chance. This becomes clear when we look more closely at the first moment of selection. McDonnell recounted how he found the video:

> *I can't remember how I actually got to that point. I think it must have come up as a video on the right-hand side*[4] *and I clicked on it to just check it out.*
>
> *I kind of stumbled across it. I wasn't looking for anything specific, I wasn't looking for samples or subject matter or anything like that. I just came across this and I was "Yeah I'm gonna record this."*

As with the case study of Lara Sarkissian, the algorithms of YouTube partially defined the framework for this sampling process. In this case, I would even place greater emphasis on the accidental approach than in the analysis of "kenats." Instead of a conscious and targeted search, McDonnell literally "stumbled across" the sample.

Instead of a conscious and targeted search, McDonnell literally "stumbled across" the sample.

The last aspect to discuss here is the procedural approach. For McDonnell, the method of sampling serves as a tool of compositional limitation. He uses samples not only because of their contextual meaning or material nature, but also because the sampling material serves simply as a means to an end: the composition of new music. The sample serves as a point of departure with an unknown destination. It is not important whether the sample is still recognizable, or indeed present at all, in the final result. The producer confirmed this method as one of his general approaches to sampling: "I'll start with a particular idea in mind for the sample, and, as I work with it, it becomes something else because I find something even more interesting beneath the layers that the process reveals."

McDonnell describes here a sampling tactic similar to those identified by Paul Harkins. In the first of three tactics described by Harkins, a sample is concealed at first before being disclosed towards the end of the track (Harkins 2010a, 9). In "Perversas," the process was exactly the opposite. Harkins' second sampling tactic fits even more closely: in his "additive approach," a track is built around an atmospheric sample that might ultimately disappear from it (10). A similar tactic has been described by Justin Morey (2017, 291) as "start with a sample, then discard it."

The track examined in this case study might rely on a similar strategy. The increasing concealment of the sampling during the production process supports this idea. In fact, McDonnell tried at one point to discard the sample, but with no success:

> *At one point I think I took [the sample] aside completely as I said "Ok, let's just make it a track that's just the drums*

4 McDonnell is referring to similar or suggested videos presented on YouTube on the right-hand side of the screen.

and the drones," but then it didn't have the same atmosphere, just didn't grab your attention in the same way (...). So initially, it was there as a much more prevalent, upfront element of the track then I got rid of it completely and then I brought it back.

This quotation shows that it was crucial for the track that the sample remained part of the project. Accordingly, the sample was definitely more than just a "compositional crutch." However, this means that the procedural approach does not serve as a primary explanation for McDonnell's choice of sample.

(b) Attitude

Although the contextual aspects of the sampled source are not much valued by the producer, it is important to discuss his attitude towards the sampled material. The YouTube video seemingly provokes harsh reactions in general, as a look through its vast number of comments reveals (xoffender45 2007). Statements range from incomprehension and shock to humorous and ironical responses and dismissive and overtly homophobic and hostile utterances towards the couple. Only a few commenters try to establish a certain understanding of the practice by engaging with the moral dilemmas it implies, though they almost always clearly distance themselves from it. All of these comments correspond to the basic reactions to zoophilia identified by Dafna Shir-Vertesh (2013, 167) in Israeli society: "humor, disgust, and lashing out." Where on this spectrum (or beyond) the producer places himself has a bearing on the analysis in this case study, regardless of how the material was eventually processed.

Finding an answer here was more difficult than in the previous case studies. As McDonnell mentioned, he felt "uncomfortable" when he watched the video; it was even "disturbing" for him. Beyond these vague statements, only the track's title can provide further indications: the word "perversas" is either a Latin or Spanish form of the adjective "perverse" in its plural feminine form. It remains open why the producer chose this particular declination. I would primarily assume aesthetic considerations—the producer uses Latin track titles now and then. The title contains a strong negative evaluation and is clearly connected to the sampled material. This allows me to assume that McDonnell considers the practices of bestiality or zoophilia to be perverted. This is not an unusual reaction to a socially taboo sexual practice, as shown above.

However, the track only acquired its current title shortly before its release. Until then the track was called "We're not Supposed to Live this Way," a title that leaves the producer's stance more open and points to the subject in question being a social taboo. McDonnell changed the title because he submitted the track to a compilation released as part

The new title clearly distances the producer from the processed material.

of a campaign against ovarian cancer. The organization releasing it asked McDonnell to change the wording as they considered it inappropriate in the context of their project. At first sight, the new title might be more disguised than its predecessor, not least because of its Latin root.[5] However, a second glance reveals an even stronger potential attitude behind it. The new title clearly distances the producer from the processed material. Nevertheless, whether this title fully reflects the producer's attitude or should be seen more as an aesthetic experiment must remain open. The processing of the sample at least suggests the latter, as it prioritizes aesthetics over meaning.

(c) Visibility

In "Perversas," Ian McDonnell processes controversial sampling material in a way that is almost completely concealed, as illustrated by the FOV. The master fader is positioned in the lower part of its range. Only the first fader is at its highest position, as the sample is clearly audible, at least in the first part of the track.

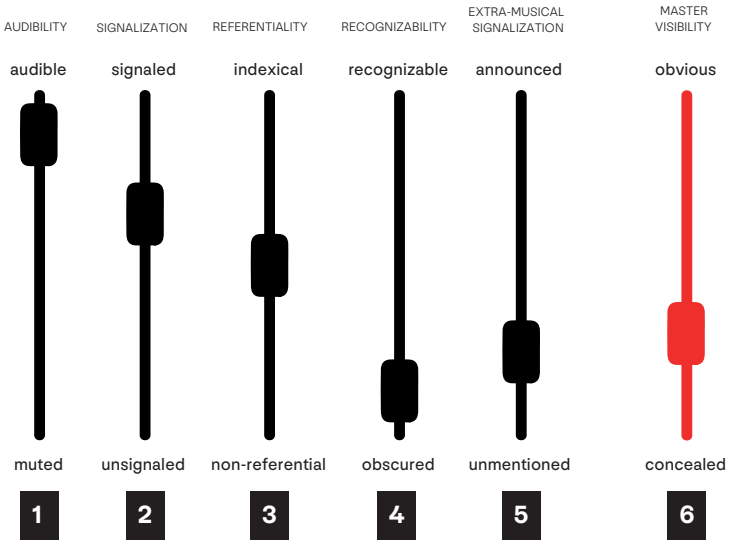

Figure 9.7: FOV: sample visibility in "Perversas"

The sample is textually signaled as such: it is clearly recognizable that vocals were processed and manipulated in the track. The vocal character of the sample becomes especially apparent when it is presented in full in bars 63–68 (sample-clip 2). The prominent vinyl crackle in the introduction further intensifies the potential perception of the track as containing sampled material. Nevertheless, it is still possible that the vocals could have been recorded by the producer, rather than sampled from external media material. Therefore, fader number 2 is not placed at its highest position. Similar to

5 Further studies of reception could step in here and examine how such a title is perceived by listeners.

the audibility of the sample, the degree of signalization decreases over the course of the track. In the last loop of sample-clip 1 (bars 163–185), the voice sample is almost muted and the vinyl crackle stops.

Fader number 3 (referentiality) is in its middle position. The sampled material makes no hard references. The particular atmosphere it is intended to evoke, described by the producer as strange, eerie, and uncomfortable, can be categorized as a soft reference. Meanwhile, fader number 4 (recognizability) is at its lowest position due to the sampled material being completely obscured by a considerable number of effects. Although a sampled voice can still be heard, the words are not comprehensible. Furthermore, this fader changed position during the process of production, as I will discuss below.

The fifth fader is also positioned at the bottom of its range, as there is almost no extra-musical signalization of the processed material. McDonnell did not talk about the material in public, explaining when asked that "it was enough to get the feeling." The only reference made is through the track's title, but this does not reveal the sample's source. The listener would need further information to identify this.

There is an interesting comment to be made at this point. The description provided by the FOV represents the situation before my research. Having since published a short article on McDonnell's sampling strategy on Norient (Liechti 2018c), I should raise the position of fader number 5. Thanks to this article, all information on the source of the sample can be traced publicly. McDonnell's participation in this study shows that he accepted the ensuing risk of his sampling strategy becoming more visible. This might not have been a difficult decision, given the limited reach of both track and article, meaning there is no foreseeable negative consequence for the producer in sharing this information publicly. However, this consideration points to a basic problem of studies on sampling practices: there are concealed sampling strategies that will never be uncovered. This case study thus serves as an accessible example of such an approach. Furthermore, it accentuates yet again the impact of the researcher on their object of study, and helps us to be aware of such issues.

This is equally the case for the analysis of M.E.S.H.'s "Methy Imbiβ" (Chapter 10).

There are concealed sampling strategies that will never be uncovered.

As mentioned, if we were to focus on an earlier stage of the production process, we would need to place fader number 4 in a higher position. This illustrates a central characteristic of the sampling tactic under discussion: a development from open processing of the sample material at the start of the production process to its increased obfuscation towards the end. McDonnell explained that there were different versions of the track:

> *As the track progressed you could initially hear exactly what they were saying, the sample was very clear. And as*

> *the track progressed and changed, I started adding beats and then this became more and more like a…* *[conversation interrupted]*

I have already discussed a remnant of this process: the long loop of sample-clip 1 that is still present in the Live file but completely muted in the mastered track (bars 2–40). In an earlier quotation, McDonnell emphasized the sample's importance to the track. Without it, he felt the desired atmosphere was lacking. On another occasion, he referred to this atmosphere as "the feeling behind the sample." This feeling seemed to be more important than the words:

> *Somewhere on the track it made more sense to obscure it and just use the… maybe the feeling behind what they're saying, the contour of the voice rather than the explicit words… if that makes sense. I think sometimes it becomes too explicit when I use somebody else's voice like that in my music. And I'd rather use the… the feeling behind what the words are saying than the actual words.*

This concealment of the sample was also, McDonnell explained, a conscious strategy to avoid "cheesiness." Indeed, reducing a sample "down to anything that works" is one of his usual approaches to music production. This was not always the case. He said that his way of working with vocal samples has changed during his career, from obvious processing towards increased concealment:

> *Particular vocal samples I'm often reluctant to use. I use them initially and then somewhere along the way I don't work with them anymore because they are too obvious and then either I remove them or disguise them like this.*

Accordingly, concealment, in this case study, is a threefold process, taking place during the process of musical production, in the course of the track, and as a part of the producer's artistic development. As a result of this process of concealment, the layers of meaning carried by the sampling material are further pushed towards invisibility, and the sample-clips are primarily used as musical material.

Drawing on the general fields of sampling motives introduced earlier in this book, I would characterize this sampling process as focusing on the fields of inspiration and communication, while having no further ambition regarding the content of the source material. The fields of inspiration and communication are in fact intertwined: on the one hand, the sample inspired McDonnell because it fit the mood of the sounds he had already composed; on the other, he used the sample to evoke a particular atmosphere and to transfer this atmosphere to the listener.

→ Chapter 5, p 115

Conclusion and Prospect

In this case study, I have presented a sampling strategy that does not stress the layers of meaning in its source material. The producer feels no need to refer to the original source—apart from in the track's title, which offers a brief hint towards the sample's origin. Without further information, it remains almost impossible to access the original layers of meaning in the sampled material. The sample primarily functions as a melodic line, taking from its source nothing more than an abstract feeling. This was the main intention behind this sampling strategy (narrative perspective).

The sample primarily functions as a melodic line, taking from its source nothing more than an abstract feeling.

Further reasons for sampling relate to the aesthetic nature of the sample (material approach), the producer's accidental encounter with the source material (accidental approach), and, to a lesser degree, the use of the sample as a "compositional crutch" and as a means to an end (procedural approach). The sampling strategy itself was shaped by a process of concealment of the sampling material, which corresponds with both the final processing of the sample in the track and the producer's general artistic development.

Finally, this analysis revealed thought processes that take place during the production of electronic music: should I leave the sample obvious or concealed? How do I avoid being "cheesy"? How can I intensify the desired atmosphere? Should I use the sample at all or should I discard it? All of these processes remain hidden to the track's recipients. In saying this, I do not want to claim that the audience should know about these processes. Such knowledge is not necessary for a successful encounter with the music. On the contrary, knowing such details relating to a sample could substantially hinder the reception of an artistic work. Nevertheless, I am convinced that such an analysis can help to reach a better understanding of popular music. It illustrates how popular music is made, *and* shows the kinds of aims, motivations, and considerations that lie behind it—and those that do not. Last but not least, disclosing sampling strategies shows mechanisms of culture at play. In the case of "Perversas," the sampling strategy points to at least three larger issues: the treatment of social taboos, voyeurism, and circulating media material as culture-making. These three issues illustrate the seismographic substance behind "Perversas."

(a) The Treatment of Social Taboos

One could characterize this sampling strategy as non-political. There is neither a political intention behind it nor any overt anchor point allowing a political reading of the track in the first instance. However, I have shown that McDonnell processed material that

deals with a highly political topic and is part of a (hidden) public debate around a social taboo. By sampling such material with a non-political intention, and by simultaneously keeping it audible, the producer depoliticizes the sampling material. He eliminates the (political) layers of meaning and completely focuses on the aesthetics of the material. Others have described similar strategies as aestheticization (Rösing 2004, 165). I consider the aspect of audibility to be crucial when using such labels. I would not speak of depoliticization or aestheticization when the sample is completely concealed, as in such cases no examination of the aesthetic potential of the material takes place (see next case study, on "Methy Imbiß"). The sampling strategy behind "Perversas" is opposed to the politicization of sound material by Mauro Guz Bejar analyzed in the previous case study.

By sampling such material with a non-political intention, and by simultaneously keeping it audible, the producer depoliticizes the sampling material.

This strategy of depoliticizing sampling material further points to the treatment of social taboos in particular societies. The comments below the YouTube video processed by McDonnell, and his own approach to it, correspond to Dafna Shir-Vertesh's observations regarding (Israeli) society's response to the social taboos of zoophilia and bestiality. Shir-Vertesh emphasizes the epistemological value of content similar to that sampled in "Perversas": "Popular culture manifestations that make people laugh or enraged can inform us of the ways people incorporate pop culture into their experiences and construct their own interpretations from them" (Shir-Vertesh 2013, 163).

"Perversas," and the sampling strategy behind it, can be regarded as just such an interpretation. Through progressive concealment of the samples over the course of the track, McDonnell mirrors society's handling of the issue in question: he broadly ignores it, while, as we have seen, personally condemning the practice. This interpretation far exceeds the analysis of authorial intentions. It is also not my intention to judge McDonnell's practice, nor to claim an elaborate stance on the part of the producer. As I have shown previously, this issue did not shape McDonnell's considerations during the production process. I rather want to emphasize the potential of popular music to reproduce and reveal social processes and phenomena. The question, however, of whether such tracks could serve as representative examples of the handling of social taboos, and to what extent such taboos might be strengthened or dissolved through popular music, would merit further study far beyond the discipline of cultural anthropology. It should also be noted that McDonnell's depoliticization of the sampled sound material in "Perversas" is not complete: through the track's title, he reintroduces the extra-musical and thus the political.

(b) Voyeurism

A second discussion centers around voyeurism as part of the phenomenon of so-called "viral videos." Often humorous in content, these videos typically become popular through being shared on video platforms and social media or via online communication. The presence of the sampling source of "Perversas" on two significant web platforms for such content, YouTube and eBaum's World, its number of clicks and views, and its categorization as "Comedy" on YouTube suggest it is a characteristic example of such a viral video. The self-description of the web platform eBaum's World summarizes the character of this kind of widely circulated online media material: "A nonchalant collection of funny pictures, slightly-dank memes, and somewhat crazy videos that eBaum's World users uploaded from all over the internet" (Google 2019).

The main aim of these videos is to entertain. For viewers they evoke, on the one hand, positive feelings such as amusement and astonishment, and on the other, negative feelings such as disgust and incomprehension. The reactions to the YouTube documentary snippet discussed above show elements of both. Considering that only a portion of such viral video content is intended as ironic or funny by its makers or protagonists—in our case, the clip stems from a presumably serious documentary—we should regard this phenomenon as problematic. I would argue that there is an element of voyeurism to it.

Voyeurism is generally understood in two ways, as either "enjoyment from seeing the pain or distress of others," or as a sexual practice (Oxford 2019a). I refer to the first meaning. Most viewers of this video presumably feel some kind of superiority over the couple portrayed in it. One is tempted to laugh at or feel sickened by them. In short, the consumption of such video content establishes or strengthens relations of power. Shir-Vertesh similarly argues that, in these contexts, "disgust" becomes a powerful tool:

Most viewers of this video presumably feel some kind of superiority over the couple portrayed in it.

> *According to [William] Miller (1997), disgust is, above all, a moral and social sentiment, a key element to social control, one that ranks people and things in a kind of cosmic ordering. Thus, disgust is a feeling that has political significance. It can maintain hierarchy, can constitute claims for superiority, as well as be elicited as an indication of the proper placement in the social order. (Shir-Vertesh 2013, 168)*

Again, these thoughts represent my own reading of the track as a substitute for social processes, rather than reflecting authorial intentions. It is not my aim to accuse the producer of "Perversas" of voyeurism. Nevertheless, a clear voyeuristic intention is not necessary for a situation to be characterized as voyeuristic. Moreover, I assume that the feelings of "uneasiness and discomfort" that McDonnell mentioned as his main sampling motivation are connected

with this discussion. These feelings might have been provoked because McDonnell, at least subconsciously, recognized the problematic aspects of his encounter with the video. McDonnell's track doesn't just reflect an interest in or fascination with the perverse, as the historian William Graebner has identified in rock music in the 1980s (Graebner 1988). Through the use of sampling, the interest becomes voyeuristic.

Through the use of sampling, the interest becomes voyeuristic.

It would now be the task of further, more specific studies to examine whether this track indeed represents a voyeuristic practice and—more generally—to what extent this example mirrors growing tendencies towards voyeurism in the time of the Participatory Web.[6] A comparative study with other tracks that sample viral media material, and an examination of the reasons for sampling behind them, could result in further insights.

(c) Circulating Media Material as Culture-Making

The last aspect I want to highlight is the importance of circulation in the present sampling strategy. Margie Borschke (2017, 159) has examined the circulation of recorded music on the internet. In her book on remix culture and the materiality and the aesthetics of copies, she sets out to study culture "from the perspective of circulation." She quotes David Novak (2013, 17–20), who showed that circulation is part of the creative process, and thus a formative force behind musical phenomena and culture.

Following Borschke and Novak, I want to stress the significance of circulation in processes of sampling as well. This case study shows this particularly clearly, as the track is substantially based on the circulation of media material. The YouTube sample originates from a documentary movie, an excerpt of which appeared on various online video platforms, before finally ending up in a track of electronic popular music. There, it was processed as aesthetic material, but it also provokes questions regarding how we handle circulating media material and how we reflect on and articulate our attitudes towards it. To a great extent, this track represents the way in which popular music is produced in the 21st century. We must now ask whether this way of producing music is changing music and culture, and if so, how? Or else we must address the question of how this process of circulation continues further, including through the present study.

■

To close this case study, I once again turn to the producer's reasons for participating. When I posed this question to McDonnell,

6 Also known as Web 2.0 or Social Web. These labels describe websites that "emphasize user-generated content, ease of use, participatory culture and interoperability (…) for end users" (Wikipedia 2019d).

he said that he was first and foremost interested in the subject of the study.[7] As McDonnell uses sampling in all of his musical productions in various ways, he showed great interest in discussing his own approach to sampling with me. For me as a researcher, this was an ideal and welcome opportunity to gain access to a producer who had already reflected considerably on his own sampling approach. Moreover, McDonnell was open to giving deeper insights into the production process behind the track in question, although he had previously decided not to disclose his reasons for sampling to a broader audience.

The next and final analysis presents the most concealed sampling strategy among all of the case studies. The track "Methy Imbiß," by electronic music producer M.E.S.H., brings back the overtly political, and shows that the processing of political sampling material must not necessarily be based on a general communicational motivation or intention.

7 A thorough examination of this question would, for all case studies, require a multi-layered analysis of motives, motivations, and intentions, such as I undertake with regard to reasons for sampling in this study. For example, strategic reasons might also play a role in a producer participating in such a study. Being part of institutional research could significantly enhance the producer's symbolic capital, in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu (Johnson 1993, 7). Such reasons might rarely be verbalized by the interviewees, see also my discussion of the strategic perspective in the SSR in Chapter 5.