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Reflections of the past – An artistic study of sampling as a multifaceted tool in electronic music

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3. Santrauka

Šiame projekte bus nagrinėjamas skaitmeninis samplavimas peržvelgiant jo atsiradimo istoriją, skirtingas praktikas ir autorių teisių problemas, siekiant atskirti sėkmingą ir nesėkmingą naudojimą bei apibrėžti kultūrinės ir socialinės aplinkos, susijusios su samplavimu, kaip elektroninės muzikos kūrimo įrankiu, vaidmenį. Hipotezė yra ta, kad naudojamas efektyviai, samplavimas gali padėti formuluoti naujus komunikacijos būdus per nemuzikinius ženklus, padidinti atlikėjo muzikos garsinį poveikį ir skatinti kūrybiškumą muzikos kūrybos metoduose. Analizuojant ankstesnius darbus ir savo kūrybinę praktiką bus bandoma atskleisti kaip samplavimas gali paveikti muzikos prodiuserį praturtindamas jo kuriamą muziką.

3. Summary

This project will explore digital sampling throughout its history, different practices, and copyright issues with the aim to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful use and define the role of the cultural and social background involved in sampling as a tool in electronic music production. The hypothesis is that when used effectively, sampling can formulate new ways of communication through non-musical signs, increase the sonic impact of the artist's music and fuel the creativity in music production methods. Through analysis of previous works and my creative practice, it will be uncovered how sampling can affect a music producer in a way that enriches the music and its listening experience.

4. Introduction

Sampling is a widely known term that describes using fragments of other, already made recordings in music production. It became popular during the 80s and 90s and continues to be implemented by artists throughout all genres. Many studies describe the nuances of sampling, techniques and concepts behind it. Yet, there is not much work pointing out how it might affect one's music. The context behind the samples and cultural signs that add depth to the music is a big part of sampling and its effectiveness. Reworking older recordings, recontextualizing various vocal or instrumental performances and taking inspiration from samples helped raise many artists music into popularity and success. Therefore, this research aims to form a deeper understanding of sampling and how it can help reinforce the artist's ideas.

5. Background

5.1 Recorded sound and musique Concrète

Until the early 20th century, music was an event that only happened in a particular situation. No way to re-listen, no way to compare if it was different or the same, even if there was a chance of listening to the same composition on several occasions. Time bounded the existence of music. Those boundaries made music something enigmatical and unrepeatable. But with the possibilities of recording, things changed drastically. The effect of recording is that it took music out of the time dimension and put it in the space dimension. It made things possible that were impossible without the new technologies. Recording made it available to listen again and again to the same performance and familiarize with the details that the listener missed the first time through[1].

With the possibility of recording came the first practitioners of sound manipulation. In many sources, Pierre Henri Marie Schaeffer is named as the earliest notable precursor to sampling. He is the originator of musique concrète, an experimental form of music created by recording sounds to tape, splicing them, and manipulating them to create sound collages. He used sounds from sources such as the human body, locomotives, and kitchen utensils. The method also involved tape loops, splicing lengths of tape end to end so a sound could be played indefinitely. Schaffer's "Étude aux Chemins De Fer" (Railroad Study), composed in 1948 is the first piece of musique Concrète—a collage assembled using sound recordings of trains. Later, composers such as John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luc Ferrari, Pierre Boulez experimented with musique concrete and helped to develop it further.

Initial tools of musique Concrète mainly consisted of Shellac recorders and record players, a mixing desk, mechanical reverberation, low-pass and high-pass filters and microphones. The application of the mentioned technologies in the creation of

[1] Brian Eno, *"Studio as a compositional tool", Audio Culture, Revised Edition: Readings in Modern Music* (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2017), 310-11

musique concrete led to the development of some sound manipulation techniques including sound transposition, sound looping, sound-sample extraction and filtering. In 1950 first functioning magnetic tape recorders helped to expand the techniques used in musique concrète. A range of extended sound manipulation practices was explored, which used improved material manipulation methods and operations such as speed variation. With tape editing, it became possible to organize sounds in a completely different way. Tape permitted material to be spliced and arranged with extraordinary new precision, and a whole new technique of production (microediting), less dependent on performance skills, was developed.

5.2 Records as raw material

The first cases of music records being used as raw material go back to as early as 1950 in Jamaica[2]. At that time not many people were able to afford their own record players, thus Jamaican DJs and selectors became culturally established. Using their own-made Sound systems with huge speaker cabinets and powerful amplifiers they played records for people to dance to. Initially the records were mostly American R&B imports that were able to be heard throughout Jamaica. During that period Winston Cooper, professionally known as Count Machuki began adding spoken word improvisations or “toasting” over records being played on sound systems. In doing so, Machuki changed the role of the Jamaican DJ from that of simply the selector of the material. Toasting over a record did more than just changed the way that record was perceived by the audience: it created a new piece of music with joint creative authorship[3].

Out of sound system culture came the instrumental “version” (omnipresent in late 1960s Jamaica). Once, a Treasure Isle studio engineer Byron Smith omitted the vocal track from a test pressing or ‘dubplate’ created for Ruddy Redwood’s SRS sound system. Allegedly, when Redwood played the mix, the crowd started singing the vocal part and that is how the instrumental version was born[4]. Instrumental versions did not

[2] Richard J. Burgess, *The History of Music Production*, (New York: Oxford University Press 2014), 167
[3] Burgess, *History of Music Production*, 167
[4] Burgess, *History of Music Production*, 168

use any additional mix techniques, but DJs would toast over them live during events and gradually, commercial singles began including versions on the B-side. As Mike Alleyne says in his authoritative book, “The Encyclopedia of Reggae”, the producers and engineers on these dub versions became “more important than the artist whose work was being remixed”[5].

5.3 First tools for sampling

Before computer memory-based samplers, musicians used tape replay keyboards. The Mellotron (1963) was the most notable one. After that came digital sampling devices of which the most popular are Fairlight CMI (1979), E-mu Emulator II (1984), Ensoniq Mirage (1985), E-mu SP-1200 (1987) and Akai MPC60 (1988).

5.4 DJs, Hip-Hop and the way sampling found its way into mainstream

The popularization of sampling records and “sampling composers”[6] is attributed to the rise of DJ’ing and Hip-Hop through the 80s and 90s. There were DJs before, during the disco period, like Francis Grasso. Grasso perfected some of what would become standard DJ techniques such as the slip cue, extending parts of a song by playing two copies of the same record then mixing between them, and beat-matching. But the debut of a radically different form of music belongs to Clive Campbell, aka DJ Kool Herc[7].

Kool Herc launched a ground-breaking new genre of music. What became an international subculture had modest beginnings on August 13, 1973, in the South Bronx. What made him fundamentally different and his influence so far-reaching was

[5] Mike Alleyne, *The Encyclopedia of Reggae: The Golden Age of Roots Reggae*, (New York: Sterling Publishing 2012)
[6] Justin Morey, Phillip McIntyre, “The Creative Studio Practice of Contemporary Dance Music Sampling Composers”*, Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* 6, 1, 2014: 41–60, DOI 10.12801/1947-5403.2014.06.01.03
[7] Burgess, *History of Music Production*, 170

his idea to “spin the percussion breakdown from two copies of the same record one after the other”[8]. He called this technique “the merry-go-round”[9]. He also put the best parts or breaks (drum solo parts) from several records together and tried “to make it sound like a record”[10]. It introduced the “concept of breakbeats”[11], which, when it collided with the technological innovation of samplers, led to “loop-based composition techniques”[12]. Herc was creating new reconstructed music using fragments of finished sound recordings and his own electronically treated verbal interjections. He focused on the most exciting parts or breaks that worked for the crowd. Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, and Grand Wizard Theodore would refine and extend Herc’s elemental contribution but, DJ Kool Herc is the originator of the music we came to know as hip hop.

[8] “DJ Kool Herc DJs his first block party at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, Bronx, New York”, *The Guardian*, Accessed October 23, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jun/13/dj-kool-herc-block-party
[9] Frank Broughton, “Interview: DJ Kool Herc”, *Red Bull Music Academy*, Accessed October 23, 2021, https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2018/01/kool-herc-interview
[10] “Interview: DJ Kool Herc”
[11] “DJ Kool Herc DJs his first block party at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, Bronx, New York”
[12] “DJ Kool Herc DJs his first block party at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, Bronx, New York”

5.5 Sampling in contemporary music production and “Sampling Composers”[13]

Since sampling music became popularized through hip-hop, DJ’ing, and technological advances, it continued to gain recognition in different contemporary practices. Moby, The Prodigy, Daft Punk, are just a few well-known names out of the sea of musicians that based their music around using fragments of others work. In an interview with Moby, he mentions how “Sampling is overcoming my weaknesses and liabilities . . . if I wanted to have wonderful vocal performances on my records, I had to get other people to sing them. Or had to sample other performances. So, without sampling, I probably never would have been particularly successful.”[14] His most successful album – “Play”, which became the biggest-selling electronica album of all time (over 12 million sold worldwide), features lots of fragments from others work. From blues to African American folk music and gospel. Moby could be noted for creativity both, in the choice of samples and their use. For example, a very well-known track from the mentioned album – “Porcelain”, uses a sample throughout the whole song. It features chords sampled from Ernest Gold’s “Fight for Survival” (1961). The chords which appear at 0:38-0:42 were sampled by Moby, later to become the theme of “Porcelain”.
The sample was reversed, which made it sound different and hard to recognize in the original song. It embodied the “Fight for Survival” in a new, fresh context. A small fragment of a record created 40 years ago now is the theme of the most popular song in Moby’s discography.

On the other side of the spectrum, influenced by the sounds of UK garage, dubstep, rave culture, comes Burial, a mythic artist with a disclosed identity. Burial is known for his electronic music in the genres of dubstep, garage also as an originator of future garage. His album “Untrue” is as popular as an album in this genre could get. Which also happens to feature heavy sample use. From video games, movies, and interviews to picking up acapellas and individual words to form sentences[15]. His manner of

[13] Morey, McIntyre, “The Creative Studio Practice of Contemporary Dance Music Sampling Composers” 41
[14] Lucy Walker, “*An Interview with Moby”, Sound Unbound*, (London: The MIT Press, 2010) 360-361
[15] "Burial – Untrue – November 2007", *Hyperdub,* Accessed November 1, 2021, http://hyperdubrecords.blogspot.com/2007/10/burial-untrue-november-2007.html

sampling various elements surrounding his life gave the album depth and sense of entity. If the listener was around similar media, recognized the samples and connected them to their sources, it gave a whole new meaning, a sense of communication. For example, his track “Archangel” from the album “Untrue” samples the acapella of Ray J’s song “One Wish” and the intro song from “Metal Gear Solid 2” (“Opening Infiltration” by Harry Gregson-Williams & Norihiko Hibino). Multiple fragments from the acapella were used to create lyrics with different meanings and emotions, whereas the samples of “Opening Infiltration” were used as the main theme.

Coming back to Hip-Hop, one of the most creative “sampling producers” could be Daniel Dumile, known as MF DOOM. His whole image as an artist builds around samples of super-hero series and movies. That happens to work very well as a direct communication to the listeners who know the same television series or media that DOOM would use. For example, one of his most praised albums – “Operation: Doomsday” begins with an interlude that features cuts from the animation series “Fantastic Four” (1967). Three different episodes serve as sample material for the song, accompanied by a sample of “No Stranger to Love” by Roy Ayers and a dialogue from a documentary “Wild Style” (1983). The interlude is followed by a song called “Doomsday”. It features samples from Sade’s “Kiss of Life” and “Poetry” by Boogie Down Productions. These are only a few examples that show how much Dumile relies on using already finished material to support his ideas and give them more life. Samples in his music are “like portals to far-flung times and places, the sample collage creates a musical event that never happened; a mixture or time-travel and séance … it’s the musical art of ghost co-ordination and ghost arrangement”[16]

[16] Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to its Own Past* (London: Faber, 2012) 313-14

5.6 Copyright issues

"If nature has made any one thing less susceptible than all others of exclusive property, it is the action of the thinking power called an idea … the moment it is divulged, it forces itself into the possession of everyone."[17]

Most art, one way or another, is influenced by others. But there is a difference between being influenced and directly taking something that belongs to someone else. That is the problem that sampling culture must face all the time. Using samples is always an ongoing debate. The laws vary from country to country, but in a nutshell, illegal sampling equals copyright infringement.

The cultural practice of sampling meshes very poorly with copyright, the body of law which turns creative expression into private property. Although there have not been many cases of this kind in Lithuania, a number of them happened abroad. For example, the first U.S. sampling case held rapper Biz Markie liable for infringing Gilbert O'Sullivan's copyright in the song "Alone Again (Naturally)". Judge Kevin Duffy began his opinion with scripture – "thou shalt not steal" – and ended it with a referral for criminal prosecution[18]. Duffy found Biz Markie guilty of infringing on O'Sullivan's copyright, ordered the rapper to pay $250,000 in damages and barred Markie's label (Warner Brothers) from selling either the single or album[19]. Despite the advent of sample-based music, it is still not clear where is the line between legal and illegal sampling. As a result, much of today's most innovative cultural production is in the shadows. It supports the popular opinion in the sampling community: It's not stealing unless you get caught.

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[17] "Thomas Jefferson to Isaac McPherson, 13 August 1813," *Founders Online, National Archives*, Accessed November 15, 2021, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0322 [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 379–386.]

[18] Daphne Keller, *"The Musician as Thief: Digital Culture and Copyright Law", Sound Unbound*, (London: The MIT Press, 2010) 314

[19] Oliver Wang, "20 Years Ago Biz Markie Got The Last Laugh", *NPR*, Accessed November 8, 2021, https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2013/05/01/180375856/20-years-ago-biz-markie-got-the-last-laugh

Of course, the only way to deal with sampling in commercial music is by clearing (process of getting permission from the owners of the sampled music) the samples and paying the author for the rights to use them. But artists, especially lesser-known underground producers, try to avoid the law and massive pay checks. It makes perfect sense that young musicians are not clearing samples and using them however they want. Sampling is just as legal as playing the piano if the music is not too popular or commercially released and when the altered work does not interfere with the original author and does not usurp the market. These statements are debatable, but it is only right for up-and-coming artists to experiment in any way they like. And once an artist is ready to release some of those experiments commercially, he must license the samples and pay the author.

6. Methodology

6.1 Introduction

For the methodology and track analysis parts of this text, I will use the first person, narrative point of view. Since the research was done using qualitative methods, it is imperative to my approach. The research methods consist of two parts. The collection of recordings and the artistic practice. I separated them as I believe they should be discussed separately. The collection of recordings involves tasks that might be unrelated to studio work and, I do not see it as one.

6.2 Collection of recordings

Firstly, to engage in the search for effective sampling in my practice I needed to find sample material. It was achieved in a few different ways. Through all the methods I made an archive of samples that I used during the studio work.

First, probably the least time-consuming way is searching through YouTube and browsing through various channels that upload rare, old, and obscure music usually recorded from vinyl (rare/obscure because of the copyright problems discussed in the previous chapter). This method is likely the most popular one amongst many producers including me, as it is easy to reach a lot of music in little time. The ability to skim through songs fast with a few mouse clicks is convenient. And, probably the most important aspect is that the archive of music in YouTube seems never-ending.

The second way of my choosing was listening to vinyl records. This method of finding music and sample material is a bit sentimental since it is the same format that popularized sampling. It encourages me to go out of my way, visit flea markets, and record shops. Also, having a physical object instead of a digital recording creates another dimension to the whole process of sampling. It requires a dedicated vinyl player hooked to a sound card and a lot of time to listen through the records to find sample material. In the end, all needs to be recorded and sorted manually. Compared

to the first method, finding samples on vinyl is much more nuanced and time-consuming. But equally rewarding as the records might not come up on the internet or anywhere else. It is also expensive, and this aspect enforces the need to be critical about choosing records and listening through them all the way.

The third way is different media. That includes commercials, movies, series, interviews, pretty much any kind of audio or audio-visual material from which fragments could be extracted. This way of sampling reinforces the idea of communication through samples. The ability to make sound collages that create different meanings, transcribing your ideas through the voices of others. Where samples become physical, cultural or phonographical signs, that replace or override musical signs and, consequently, a different kind of communication takes place[20].

6.3 Artistic Practice

Secondly, the artistic practice took place. To determine effectivity in sampling and explore the hypothesis of this research, I needed to engage myself in the creative act. My main intention was to build tracks around particular samples. For the tracks to be sample led. By that, I mean that the sample would mainly determine where the song would go harmonically, rhythmically etc. Later, the songs would be edited, samples adjusted, sometimes completely omitted (when they served just as the starting point or inspiration).

I created many drafts, taking elements from the sample archive and experimenting with them. The result is four finished tracks that serve as the practical part of my work. In the following chapter, I will discuss how those tracks reflect the ideas of this research.

[20] Timothy Warner, "*Pop Music: Technology and Creativity"*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) 97

7. Track Analysis

7.1 “Troškimai“

“Troškimai“ started with a sample of a track by the Lithuanian band Argo. Their Album “Discophonia” is one of the first Lithuanian electronic records. The sample came directly from a vinyl record which I was lucky enough to find in a flea market in Kaunas (Bagažinių Turgus). The sample is a sequence of two chords from the song “A4”. Those chords served as the starting point for the harmony, and I omitted the sample as I built the track around them. Thus, this fragment of Argo song fuelled my creative decisions for this composition. Later it is brought back as an FX element in a few parts of the song. I also used tracks “A1” and “B3” from the same album. A vocal sample from “A1” and a hi-hat sample from “B3”. Afterwards, the sample in the break part (2:20) before the beat change was taken from the vinyl of Maironis poetry, narrated by Laimonas Noreika. It serves as a homage to one of the most known poets in Lithuania. Also, it functions as an interlude between drum parts that adds context to the track. The Poem is called “Vasaros Naktys” (Summer Nights) and, it hints at an ever-dreaming mind. The Poem was edited and put together differently to make up a new meaning that I intended. “Pete Sings” was found on YouTube. And as understood through the comment section and the description, it is a self-recorded demo tape of an unknown singer in the 90s. Using his demo the way I did revises the recording, puts the singer in a context he would probably never imagine being. It creates new meaning to his work and reinforces mine.

7.2 “Say It”

“Say It” started as an attempt to create a more modern, club version of the track “Breikas” by Egidijus Sipavičius. During various sample manipulations and compositional decisions, I chopped the sample, re-edited it and left only a few short fragments in the final track. Those short fragments are the snare sound and a few vocal phrases placed throughout the piece. Similarly to the first track, “Breikas“ served as an inspiration rather than the leading sample. What differentiates this track from the first one is that the sample inspired the groove and the drum programming of the track. The way I sampled this song changes its character, while a similar groove still carries the essence of the hit it once was. The vocal part of the track comes from a DJ acapella album. It is called “Fall Down“. The sample was chopped up into pieces and recombined to create new meaning. Also, I manipulated the sound to reshape the timbre and make it as transformed as it could be while maintaining the character of the original recording.

7.3 “For Real”

“For Real” started with the song “Can I See You Tomorrow” by Tender Touch. And it presents a more traditional approach to sampling in my practice. The vocal chops are less manipulated than in other tracks. Most of the remaining samples I used are percussion elements that fill the drum groove. Although simple, the sample manipulation technique is quite experimental. I spliced the track (vocals isolated) using RX7 software and took just a few bits from the whole sample. Those few bits became a big part of the theme for the track. Reintroducing the vocals in a different musical context makes them sound different and rather unreminiscent from the original song. Towards the end (3:07), I sampled the movie “Ransom”. I was looking for sounds of a ringing phone or a call picking up, and somehow found my way to this clip of the movie. It ended up in the track before the last part, like a monologue of the protagonist, if there was one. That, I believe, adds depth to the song, revises the scene of the movie differently, and makes the listening experience more profound. It also supports the idea of communication through samples, as the people being aware of the scene would be pleasantly surprised while listening to the song. It gives voice to me as a creator, speaking through a recontextualized movie scene.

7.4 “On Hold”

“On Hold” is a track directly influenced by listening through numerous soviet electronic records. I was particularly inspired by the series “Sports & Music” from the label Мелодия (Melody). Album “Pulse 1” impelled my experiments with various drum sounds from the record. I created similarly sounding but reimagined drum parts and omitted most of the original samples. I used pieces from “Telefon” by Piknik as the basis of fx sounds and transitions in the track. “Baltos Juodos Klajos” by Donis was revised and used as the piano part for the song, adding subtle touches of a real piano and making the atmosphere more organic. The finishing pieces for this track were taken from “Tu” by Laimis Vilkončius. The song shares similar energy to one I wanted in my composition. It being in Lithuanian adds context to the track, as the fragments are short, only native speakers would understand them. The sample was re-balanced using RX7 software, leaving only the vocal and drum parts and making it easier to implement into an already made harmonic context. Later, I processed the samples by pitch-shifting them and experimenting with various effects such as phaser and reverb.

7.5 Self-Reflection

Through artistic practice my understanding of what is effective sampling shifted.
In some cases, I used the samples creatively, transforming them beyond recognition. But other fragments retained most of the original context such, as the Maironis sample. Although, in my work, I wanted the tracks to sound original therefore most of the samples served as inspirations and starting points which later would be either omitted or completely re-worked. What I found interesting is that sampling was mostly idea-driven in my case. Deciding whether samples should be heavily transformed or not was up to me, which makes the effectiveness of it all highly subjective. But one thing most would agree on is that successful sampling depends on an "instinct that develops from being around music … it is the reason that DJs with no musical or technical ability can still become excellent producers. They have listened to many, many records, logged the way people responded to the music and subconsciously programmed their instinct to be able to reproduce those excitement factors in their own records".[21]
Linking back to the communicational aspect, my practice uses samples as an intention to communicate through them, rather than direct communication to an audience. All the tracks have signs that could override musical ones, but it depends on the listeners and whether they recognize some of the samples. What was also interesting is the way sample sourcing guided the studio work. Using samples from vinyl records had certain limitations that forced me to be creative with the fragments I found usable. In comparison, YouTube recourses were limitless, thus making me re-think the sample choices and leading to more frustration during the process. On the same note, audio quality from vinyl records was seemingly better, despite various crackles and other noises. While samples retrieved from YouTube were mostly low-quality, demanding more effort through the process of making them usable.

[21] Richard J. Burgess, "*The Art of Record Production*" (London: Omnibus Press 1997) 177

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research unveils a few things. Firstly, the question is not what effectivity in sampling is, but what does effective sampling demand from a producer. It could be discussed widely how different samples essentially make or break a track, but what became apparent is that the "'feel for the game' … 'second sense' or a second nature"[22] dictates if and how sampling can affect a music producer in a way that also benefits the listener's experience. Therefore, it is evident that sample-based production is not all about the skills in the studio but rather about the taste in music. Consequently, if a producer's taste matches up with other people's preferences, sampling might make all the difference for the music he is making. Secondly, this work presents the beginnings of sampling and the basis of understanding how it works, which could be used by others that are interested in this subject. It opens doors for others to explore the question to a greater extent, focus more on nuances that sampling involves, and experiment with different concepts and techniques that would contribute new knowledge to this already widely explored field. To summarize, this artistic study investigated sampling in different ways, brought new ideas, and provided evidence of how samples can drive and add depth to the concepts a producer has, making the music a more engaging experience.

[22] Pierre Bourdieu, "*The Field of Cultural Production"*, (New York: Columbia University Press 1993) 5

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