These are the breaks

Sampling in the pop era: An exploration and conversation

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"Allow myself to introduce... myself."

Drummer/Percussionist
DJ
Producer/Remixer
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Musicologist
Practice in Roots of Popular Music
& Sample Flips

- Pop culture, by design, is built directly from raw materials of the generations and iterations that came before it.

- Pop music, for its part in and of this, demonstrates this with the use of sampled music and recycled elements, borrowed bits and "breaks" of old records, strange digital instruments, and analog artifacts that are sometimes uniquely, sometimes universally, borrowed, re-contextualized, and made new.

- As a career drummer, DJ, and producer growing up during 80s pop, 90s dance hits, and the first generation of Hip-Hop, my work has been tracing the roots and branches of drum breaks; isolated moments in recorded music when drums and accompanying rhythm tracks are laid bare, and thus can be borrowed easily for use and interpretation by other artists.

- This action of sampling is not just crucial, but essential to the survival of art in general, and specifically for modern art.

- These examples represent just of many points of intersection in pop culture sampling, which include issues of intellectual property, legality, license, cultural appropriation, and exploitation.

Define Sampling and the Breaks
Look at Visual Analogues and Their Take-Aways
Listen to Musical Examples
Review Their Histories, Contexts, and Potential Issues
Continue the Conversation

What is Sampling?
Stealing? Taking? Borrowing? Appropriating?

- Sampling is the use of a portion or elements of an existing work to incorporate into a new work

- A break is a portion of a song where many of the instruments drop out, leaving the drums and rhythm tracks bare

- By design, sampling a previous work brings it in to a new context, thusly presenting it to a:

  - new generation

  - new era

  - new audience

Guides & Examples

- Liberal Arts and University interdisciplinary studies allow for visual examples, particularly for those who are not native in music-speak

- If we use visual examples as guides, perhaps we can see and understand works with samples as an analogue to collages or mixed media works

- Three distinctly different works in three distinct eras

- Not only give guides for understanding the principles, but thematically and chronologically set the stage for our musical examples

- Offer perspective on the emerging use of samples in the nascent art form known as hip-hop, as well as electronic pop, in the late 70s and early 80s

Marcel Duchamp
"Fountain"

"Fountain" - 1917

- Represented the beginning of the dada movement in modern art

- Made use of Readymades, already existing objects that were found or acquired

- Placed in a new context to make a new statement and, essentially, become a new thing

René Magritte
"The Treachery of Images"
or "Ceci n'est pas une pipe."

"The Treachery of Images" - 1929

- A quintessential example of both the surrealism and minimalism movements

- Also a defining example of metamessage and paralanguage

- Demonstrative of the concept that if we take something out of its original context, it allows us to play with its inherent nature and qualities

"The famous pipe.
How people reproached me for it!
And yet, could you stuff my pipe?
No, it's just a representation, is it not?
So if I had written on my picture
"This is a pipe", I'd have been lying!"

— René Magritte

Andy Warhol
"Marilyn Diptych"

"Marilyn Diptych" - 1962

- One of the artists most notable works, and one of his most recognized in a series of works centered around movie star and actress Marilyn Monroe

- Named the "3rd Most Influential Piece of Modern Art" in a survey of 500 artists, critics, tastemakers, and other influential figures as published by British daily newspaper The Guardian

- Warhol applies his own influence so greatly to the source material as to completely affect its presentation

- The source essentially becomes notes in a rhythm

"Although some of Warhol's work was commissioned by individuals or companies, much of it was appropriated from other artists, photographers, and brands. Two of his most famous pieces, Marilyn Diptych and the collection of Campbell's soup cans, are examples of his habit of appropriation. For the Marilyn series, Warhol took a promotional photograph of Marilyn Monroe and transferred it onto silkscreen print using different colors. He did not own the promotional photograph that he used and he did not have permission to use it. The resulting work was transformative enough that a strong fair use argument could be made today, but Warhol's appropriation is undeniable."

"Andy The Appropriator:
The Copyright Battles You Won't Hear About at The Whitney's Warhol Exhibit"
The Columbia Journal of Law & the Arts

Cultural Topics

- Where do the elements come from?
attribution, environmental, social/cultural inputs, and what the original work's intent is

- Who is the artist or copyright owner?
intellectual property

- Where does the money flow?
contracts, licesnses, legalities

- Is this deal fair?
opportunism, appropriation, and racism/sexism

- Proper compensation and credit

Music Samples That Have Changed the World

- It is from the notes and the rhythm of Marilyn that we look at three specific musical examples

- Like the visual art examples discussed, these examples started their lives decades ago and are still appearing in pop and commercial music and influencing culture today
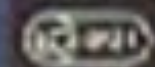
Good Times
Chic
1979

Points of Interest and Cultural Discussion

- Upon release, almost immediately sampled/interpolated by Sugarhill Records for the Sugarhill Gang's Rappers Delight

- Unique and singular in that the two songs were nearly concurrent on the pop culture radar and charts, having been borrowed for use by Sugarhill Records as soon as it was out in the public sphere

- Interpolation, not actual sample. Which is now the point at which we begin to make that precise distinction between these two terms

- Truth be told, this was actually more of the common practice at the time; to re-record the track with a live band, rather than "sample" it

- Hardware did not exist at that time for phrase sampling, so it truly was not a thing yet

- We'll look at another notable example of a song that has been both interpolated and sampled later in this presentation

Funky Drummer
James Borwn
1970

FUNKY DRUMMER (Part 1)

JAMES BROWN

STEREO

KING

45-6290

KING RECORDS, inc. ● 1540 Brewster Ave. ● Cincinnati, Ohio 45207

Points of Interest and Cultural Discussion

- James Brown and the music from his expansive career has been foundational bedrock for hip-hop music for generations now. From DJ Kool Herc and his legendary merry-go-round breaks of James Brown exhorting "Clap your hands! Stomp your feet!" all the way to sophisticated interpretations of his wide and vast collection of drum breaks, instrumental interludes, and gospel-style shouts

- It was as well known then as it is now that James Brown was a fearsome taskmaster of a bandleader who notoriously underpaid and under-credited his musicians. Thus, there would ever be little chance of any of the many musicians who appeared with James Brown and had been sampled to receive any sort of royalties or compensation

- In fact, it was truly because it was a value in hip-hop culture to honor the originators and earlier generations of music that these peoples' names were ever learned by the general public

Ashley's Roachclip
Churk Brown & the Soul Searchers
1974

Points of Interest and Cultural Discussion

- One of the most easily identifiable breaks of hip-hop and pop music history, crossing genres and generations

- Was popularized by the breakout hit by Eric B and Rakim, Paid in Full, later remixed by the UK electronica group Coldcut

- Had explosive popularity in usage, especially around that era of the late 80s and early 90s, where it made frequent appearances on the Billboard charts via songs that gratuitously used the drum break

- Regrettably, around that same time, the group was calling it quits, and some of those members of the band appearing in the now-famous sample were not receiving any royalties and working less-than-glamorous jobs.

And, it continues on and on...

Genius of Love
Tom Tom Club
1981

Genius of Love

- Just like our first example of good times and rappers delight, genius of love was on the charts at a time when songs that sampled it were also coming into popularity

- Also like our first examples, these first generation usages were interpolations, not technically samples

- After being released in 1981, the original was on the charts that year, quickly followed by genius rap later that year, and it's nasty by grandmaster flash and the furious five in 1982

- Mariah Carey famously resurrected the song via a sample usage in 1995

- The Mariah Carey song has now been sampled and is a current billboard hit

Conclusion

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- Samples and their use have provided a valuable resource of exciting and meaningful makeready elements in music for many generations

- These samples and their various iterations and appearances have done their effective part to add potent elements to the pop-culture lexicon

- With this has come entirely new conversations of fair use, commercial use, educational use, and exploitative use that did not exist before this past half century

- New areas of law and business handle this hot commodity

Conclusion

- Understanding the cultural implications of this conversation, as is the case with many others, requires empathy, understanding, and context

- In the context of our liberal arts education here at the University of Hartford, that could mean that in order to correctly engage in this conversation, and incorporate all of the Socio economic political and artistic legal and personal aspects, we need to engage in capacity building

- I challenge us all to consider that the need for a capacity building is not necessarily the capacity to prove your side of this argument, but rather the capacity to hold all interested sides and parties in your own two hands

Many Thanks

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