

SAMPLING IN SCHOLARSHIP

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In some ways, the history of interpreting hip-hop has mirrored the broader history of interpreting popular music overall. Early scholars of the genre tended to look at its deformations and reformations of language, and also tended to accentuate the art form's connection to other forms of (especially) African-American culture, much as popular-music studies, through most of the 1970s and 1980s, foregrounded the linguistic, literary, and more broadly social aspects of vernacular music (Negus 1996). Richard Shusterman's in many ways ground-breaking study (1991) focused on rap music as a properly postmodern phenomenon, foregrounding sampling as an example of »recycling appropriation rather than unique originative creation, the eclectic mixing of styles, the enthusiastic embracing of the new technology and mass culture, the challenging of modernist notions of aesthetic autonomy and artistic purity, and an emphasis on the localized and temporal rather than the putatively universal and eternal« (Shusterman 1991: 614).

One can easily see how sampling, especially the sampling of the late 1980s to early 1990s, would lend itself to such aesthetic and ideological priorities, though, much to his credit, Shusterman also cites the social grounding of sampling (and other aspects of rap music) in African-American history and aesthetics. Sampling, in this context, becomes a privileged aesthetic practice for its exemplification of certain philosophical principles (appropriately, since Shusterman is a philosopher), and though Shusterman does briefly explain cutting, scratching, and mixing, his exposition of sampling underlines its aesthetic alliances with his own brand of postmodern pragmatism. While those who, now, nearly twenty years later, slogged through endless debates about postmodernism may have little patience for arguments like Shusterman's, in a sense, the essay does us the favor precisely of underlining its own historical moment (in any way, of course, also consis-

tent with the aesthetic and philosophical principles that Shusterman is advocating).

Thus Tricia Rose's initial study (1994) underscored the entanglement of rap music with African-American priorities in a way that would shape discussions of the music, and of hip-hop culture generally, for many years to come (and arguably up to the present). Of course, in many ways, such a gesture paralleled the reception of rap music and hip-hop culture in American culture generally (especially at the time), as well as conforming to Rose's own disciplinary grounding in African-American studies. In this way, hip-hop music went from being postmodern to being African-American, in terms of its disciplinary framing, and it has never really left there.

Robert Walser's more musicologically-inclined article (1995) underlines, as its title implies, the rhythmic aspects of Public Enemy's »Fight the Power« (from Public Enemy 1989); while Walser is not always careful to disentangle the rhythmic aspects of Chuck D's MCing from those of the samples used in the song, and he greatly simplifies the latter (perhaps inevitably, given the Bomb Squad's production style), at least there was some serious attention given to the significance of the sample, and it played some role in the meanings being created in the song. My first book (2000) focused on both MCing styles and the effects of layered samples, depending on the analytical point being made; and while the most attention has been paid to my analysis of Ice Cube's »The Nigga Ya Love To Hate«, arguably sampling played at least an equal role in my analysis of the Goodie MOB's »Soul Food«, especially in its keying of a geographic identity for the group.¹ In particular, my identification of a sampling strategy that I labelled the »hip-hop sublime«, in that book, seemed to capture the attention of a number of other scholars, perhaps because of the proximity of sound to meaning, in that instance.

While my first book was the first music-theoretical (or, in Continental terms, »musicological«) book about sample-based rap music, Joe Schloss's monograph on sample-based hip-hop (2004) greatly advanced the discussion of sampling and altered many of its contours. Where I had done some ethnography with little-known producers (and other artists) in Canada and the Netherlands, Schloss based his method far more thoroughly on ethnography

1 One reviewer (Walker 2001) even went so far as to speculate that I might have written the Ice Cube chapter last; in fact, the opposite is the case. I revised that chapter from a chapter of my doctoral dissertation, the only material in the book that existed in some form before I set out to write the book. I do not normally respond to assertions in reviews of my work, but in this case, the point is salient, since my own later practice in discussing sampling more closely resembles that of other, later-originated parts of that book.

and many better-known artists. Equally, Schloss showed the existence of ethical strictures among hip-hop producers that vitally determine aspects of the art that they produce; in a sense, aesthetics and ethics become different aspects of the same thing, in Schloss's description, and practice and artistic ethos merge with remarkable clarity.

Wayne Marshall used some of these helpful contributions and some of his own to reframe the question of how ›authenticity‹ can be maintained in an era in which hip-hop (really in particular, rap music) production is increasingly turning away from expensive and complex sample-based sound to sound based more on new sources; as Schloss had also pointed out, the sample-based sound was key to an ethos of ›authenticity‹ among producers. My own re-entry to discussing hip-hop sampling and production (2007) was in the much-altered context of discussing music and urban change, and accordingly my focus was less on the composition and combination of the elements and their generic construction and signification, and more on what I saw as a broad aesthetic change in representation in the world of hip-hop media generally. In the meantime, virtually unseen to us in the Anglophone world, some German scholars were working their own mixture of musicological and cultural theory into discussions of sampling (Großmann 2005, Elflein 2006, Rappe 2007, Pelleter/Lepa 2007, Kautny 2008), in work that was both analytical and culturally informed, and that also availed itself of the theoretical work on culture, genre, authenticity, and technology developed in other areas of popular-music studies. It is that world which I encountered on attending the *Sampling in Hip-Hop* conference in Wuppertal, in which I was privileged to participate in 2009, and much of whose fruits can be seen in the present issue of this journal. Sampling, as Marshall's, Schloss's, Großmann's, Elflein's, Rappe's, Pelleter and Lepa's, Kautny's, and my work have all demonstrated is a particular way of construction a musical fabric, with results that are unique sonically, referentially, culturally, and socially; and, of course, its musical reach has broken through the bounds of rap music to inflect contemporary R&B, nu metal, turntablism, electronic dance music, and other emerging and developing music genres. Taken sampling seriously and examining it as a phenomenon in its own right (which is not to say in isolation from culture or social forces) allows scholars to understand more about the world of contemporary and recent music, which is to say a significant portion of the contemporary world. My thanks go to Oliver Kautny, for organizing the 2009 conference and asking me to keynote it, and for putting together this impressive collection of essays. Enjoy!

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