Art of DJing and the Impact of Sampling: A Listening Guide

In the late 1970’s a new (at least to popular music) art form arose in which artists began to use the turntable and a sound system, and then digital electronics that simulated the effects you could get from these sound systems, to create what was in effect new music. In the reading Martin says that it is “the first real post-1970s musical paradigm to come out of rock.”

A. General Reading

We will start with several readings that discuss this new type of music and its predecessors. Read the following pieces and answer the first set of questions below:

- Bill Martin, Avant Rock, pp 134 – 142

1. We know that John Cage and have used the turntable as an instrument for many years.
   - Martin makes the point that modern DJs have done something new. What have they done that is new?
   - Martin says that John Cage, although favoring the suppression of self-expression by a musician or composer, was in search of something.
     - What was he in search of?
     - How has modern turntablism and electronica joined Cage in this quest?
     - In the process, how is it sometimes using old sounds in new ways?

3. When we discussed Bob Dylan “going electric” in 1965, one of the themes was that Dylan brought the value of “authenticity” to rock and roll – one of the key changes in its transition to rock, in fact. In “Music in the Age of Electronic (Re)production,” the authors argue that the technological developments pioneered by Cage, Schaeffer, and later Eno have undermined the category of musical “authenticity”?
   - What do the authors mean?
   - What do they say about the “recorded event” and the “live event”?
   - How have the new possibilities in musical technology raised questions about what it means to be the ‘author’ of a musical work?
   - What do the authors say about the reappropriation of musical technologies that agrees with Martin’s point about joining with Cage’s quest?
4. In the introduction to Chris Cutler’s article on “Plunderphonia,” he discusses John Oswald’s creation of a new “The Great Pretender.” We will listen to another of his creations from Elvis Presley’s 1957 #1 single, “Don’t.”

- Listen to Presley’s “Don’t” and then to Oswald’s version.
- What has Oswald done to change the sound of the original?
- What was Oswald forced to do with his “Plunderphonics” CD?
- What does Cutler say that plunderphonics undermined? How so?
- Oswald gives a history of plunderphonics and electronic music, most of which we have discussed in our course: musique concrete, Dada, Cage, Varèse, Stockhausen, Zappa, the Beatles. He then says that digital sampling produced what was, in essence, a whole new ball game. Why did the importance of plundering increase so much with the advent of digital sampling?
- Why is this important? How has the music of the last 20 years or so relied on plunderphonics in one way or another?

5. In their article on “DJ Culture,” what do the authors say that what DJ Culture is?

- What two essential concepts does DJ Culture work with? What do they involve?
- How do the authors say that DJ Culture has opened up an entirely new cultural space? What do they mean by this?

6. Read “Replicant: On Dub” from Audio Culture, listen to the dub recordings by Lee “Scratch” Perry and King Tubby, and watch the “I am an Upsetter” video.

- Lee “Scratch” Perry is a dub pioneer. According to Allmusic, “some call him a genius, others claim he's certifiably insane, a madman.”¹ Whichever he is, he is an important reggae artist and producer who produced recordings by Bob Marley and the Wailers among other. Listen to “Vamp a Dub,” which is an example of Perry’s music and also a good example of a reggae recording. What is distinctive about its rhythm?
- Your reading describes how King Tubby used existing recordings to produce his dubs. How did he do it? Where can you hear dub techniques in “Tubby’s Vengeance” and “Vamp a Dub”?

7. Listen to the disco hit, “I Feel Love.” Giorgio Moroder used a Moog synthesizer and drum machine to produce almost all of the background to Donna Summer’s singing in this recording.

- We already have heard a synthesizer in Krautrock, industrial, synth-pop, and Brian Eno’s music. What is Moroder doing differently than in these styles? What is he doing that is roughly the same?

8. Read about the rise of disco in “Love is the Message.”

- What was the Stonewall rebellion and what did it have to do with disco?
- What incidents do the authors cite as contributing to the “end of rock” in 1969-70? Why did several clubs in NYC “go gay” at around the same time?
- Who was DJ Francis and what did he contribute to disco?
- What were DJ Francis’s “revolutionary techniques”?
- What do the authors cite as being the birthplace of disco? What happened there that was different?
- What do the authors say about the birth of modern DJing?

¹ “Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry,” www.allmusic.com
9. Read the “Hip-Hop” chapter from *Modulations* and listen to the assigned recordings in the "Hip-Hop" section.
- "Rapper’s Delight" was the first multi-platinum rap recording. How does it sound compared with the rap of today? How have things changed since 1979?
- “Planet Rock” is cited in your reading on Hip-Hop as being a breakthrough. Why were the new instruments used in this recording and where do you hear this instrument?
- In “Planet Rock’s” predecessors, sampling had preserved the sampled elements intact, producing what was essentially a medley of pop hits. How does Afrika Babbaataa use sampling differently?
- What do you hear from Krautrock in “Planet Rock”? (Because of the technical limitations of the time, some of these actually are not sampled, but replayed.)
- With whom is Run-DMC performing in their cover of “Walk This Way”? What important style of ’70s rock are they fusing with rap?
- How have Run-DMC changed rap from the “old school” sound of “Rapper’s Delight” and “Planet Rock”?

10. Listen to the two assigned Public Enemy recordings.
- What does Public Enemy bring to rap that you have not heard in the previous music in this lesson?
- How are their rap “lyrics” different?
- How is their sound different?
- What have they drawn from the avant-garde?

11. Listen to “Close (to the Edit)” by The Art of Noise, which was a hit single.
- What do you hear in this song that certainly is pop-oriented?
- What about the recording as a whole – why is it grouped under the music collage section?
- Compare the use of sampling in “Close (to the Edit)” with the dub, disco, and rap music you have heard in this lesson?
- How would you describe “Close (to the Edit)” to someone who has not heard it?

12. Listen to Christian Marclay’s "Jukebox Capriccio" and read the interview with Marclay in *Audio Culture*.
- Christian Marclay was the first non-rap DJ to make an art form out of the turntable, treating the instrument as a means to rip songs apart, not bridge them together.” Is he more or less avant-garde than the rap you have heard today?
- What earlier musicians or composers are an obvious inspiration for “Jukebox Cappricio”? Why do you say this?
- In the interview with Christian Marclay, what does he identify as his influences? What was Fluxus? What significance did Fluxus have earlier in the course?
- What does “high and low” culture mean? How does Marclay position himself between high and low culture?
- How does Marclay use new technology? How does he relate this to Dada?

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2 Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, p. 245
3 “Christian Marclay,” www.allmusic.com

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13. Listen to “Stress in Marriage” by Negativland.
   • This recording is named after a track on a Neu! recording. On the basis of “Stress in Marriage,” is Negativland very close to Neu! in sound or style?
   • Given the music you have heard, to which Krautrock band is Negativland most indebted? Why?
   • How is “Stress in Marriage” a sound collage? How do the sounds support the lyrics? What do you think Negativland is trying to say in this song?

14. What was John Cage’s definition of music in his credo? How does this definition relate to some of the collage music to which you have listened?

15. Listen to “Info Freak,” by Jesus Jones. Are sound collage techniques and old-fashioned rock antithetical?

16. Listen to “The Number Song” by DJ Shadow, a later song done in the nineties. What does “The Number Song” draw from the earlier styles you have heard in this lesson. What new do they have to offer?

17. Listen again to all the music in this lesson and ask yourself the following questions:
   • What is new in this music? What sets it apart from the music of the previous decades?
   • Is this music more experimental or more of a consolidation of previous experiments?
   • What do these bands and their music have in common?
   • How are the bands and their music different from each other?

18. In this course we are following five general trends that characterize most, if not all, of the ways that the avant-garde music has influenced popular music. Which of the five general trends is evident in the music to which you have listened today?
   • Simplicity
   • Decomposition of Musical Structure
   • Pastiche
   • Electronic Music
   • Noise as Music