

# NOSTALGIA ON SOUNDCLLOUD: RECYCLING AS A MUSIC PRODUCTION SUPERPOWER

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

“Nostalgia can be a poetic creation, an individual mechanism of survival, a countercultural practice (...) It is up to us to take responsibility of our nostalgia and not let others “prefabricate” it for us. (...) The imperative of a contemporary nostalgic: to be homesick and to be sick of being at home occasionally at the same time.” (Boym, 2001, para. 7 )

According to the British lifestyle magazine *Dazed*, the presence of nostalgia in our contemporary culture peaked in 2023 (Angus, 2023). In 1989, the writers Shaw and Chase wrote in their book *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* that nostalgia arises from a sense of dissatisfaction with the present (Shaw & Chase, 1989).

In order to address the question of why there is an accumulation of musical blends and edits that rework nostalgic material on SoundCloud and what this referential practice indicates, we will explore sampling, hauntology, nostalgia, blend and edit culture to understand the different elements that feed into the sample-based music production that manifests itself in a nostalgic trend on SoundCloud.

This paper examines the evolution of sampling, starting with musique concrete and the techniques substantial contribution to the establishment of hip hop culture. Furthermore, it presents a perspective on sampling based on the concept of hauntology to understand the persistence of samples as former cultural artefacts participating in contemporary cultural production.

Additionally, this paper examines the reception of nostalgia and its transformation from a medical condition to a broader socio-cultural concept. Through an investigation of the blend and edit culture on SoundCloud, song examples, artist statements and an insight into a personal artistic work that deals with the emotional qualities and musical production of this trend, this paper explores how this culture reworks mainstream media into nostalgic artistic collages.

## 2 SAMPLING AND HAUNTOLOGY

Sampling is a creative tool in music production, that involves the re-use of an excerpt (or sample) of a pre-existing sound recording within a new musical composition. This process is often associated with the genre of hip hop and electronic dance music or EDM (Harkins, 2020).

According to Needham (2022) the origins of sampling can be traced back to the 1940s with musique concrète, where Pierre Schaeffer and other pioneers such as Daphne Oram took recorded sounds on tape, assembled and manipulated them into sound collages. The BBC Radiophonic Workshop played an important role in introducing musique concrète to a wider audience, using sampling techniques in the production of soundtracks for various programs, such as the tv series “Doctor Who” (Rogers, 2011).

The term "sampling" was initially coined in the late 1970s by Kim Ryrie and Peter Vogel, the inventors of the Fairlight CMI to describe one of the attributes of their digital synthesizer (Howell, 2005). Early adopters of the Fairlight CMI include singer-songwriter and record producer Kate Bush and British producer Trevor Horn, who pioneered sampling in pop and electronic dance music (McNamee, 2018).

Parallel to the use of sampling in pop and EDM, sampling also became an important element of hip hop culture. The author, beatmaker and rapper Amir (2015) states “Hip hop is actually a culture of sampling”(p. 50). By framing hip hop culture in this way, Amir (2015) refers to the abilities of the residents of the South Bronx who, suffering from the fragmentation caused by the South Bronx Disaster, took parts of the American mainstream media and converted or flipped them to suit their own needs and values.

The musical practice of sampling in hip hop goes back to dub music in the 1960s. Jamaican Dub producers like King Tubby and Lee "Scratch" Perry initiated the practice of utilizing recorded reggae rhythms to create riddim tracks (Prahlad, 2001).

When Jamaican immigrants introduced this technique to hip hop producers like Jamaican born Clive Campbell (DJ Kool Herc) in the South-Bronx, New York in the 1970s, musical sampling became an integral part of hip hop culture (McCann, 2017).

However, there’s an interesting counter opinion by Amir (2015), who states that “[Kool Herc himself] matter of factly dispels and denounces the Jamaican-origins narrative”, and therefore emphasises, that “Hip hop/rap music did not stem from Jamaican music culture” (p. 50). Sampling made it possible for a single sample to be used in several tracks and therefore had a substantial impact on the emergence of songs and genres.

A 5.2-second long sample from the song "Amen, Brother" by The Winans featured the "amen break" drum pattern, which was performed by Gregory C. Coleman. A drum sample that was used in the hip hop hit song "Straight Outta Compton" by N.W.A, as well as serving as the foundational rhythm for jungle and drum and bass (Hoolbrook, 2020).

“Discussing his invention of the ‘readymade’, Marcel Duchamp said his invention was to free the art from the sphere of the handmade; a sample is like a sonic readymade, and artists who make music out of samples are freeing music from the sphere of the hand-played.” (Reynolds, 2011, p. 315)

In the book *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (2011), the English music journalist and author Reynolds draws a parallel between readymade art and sampling. This comparison aims to describe a mental rethinking of music-making as a creative process and the emancipation from composing as a craft-based practice. It also raises questions about the significance of recontextualising existing sound material within a new piece.

Sampling is not only a creative tool in music production but also creates an acoustic connection between the past and the present. In order to address the temporal dimension and the spiritual content of musical artefacts from the past, this paper examines sampling from a perspective of the concept of hauntology.

Hauntology refers to the return or persistence of elements from the social or cultural past. The term was first introduced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his 1993 book *Specters of Marx* (Gallix, 2011).

According to Davis (2005) the concept describes the ambivalence between the presence and absence of former cultural artefacts in our present, the concept uses the figure of the ghost or the state of being haunted.

In the context of hauntology, samples are audible cultural artefacts from the past that are brought into conversation with contemporary sound during the process of sample-based music production. As described by audiotechnology scholar Sterne (2003), the advent of sound recording, on which sampling is based is a preserving, disembodied process. Sound recording separated the human voice from the human body for the first time. In this sense a record is a ghost, a trace of a human body. Sampling amplifies its inherent supernaturalism (Reynolds, 2011).

As Reynolds states it, “the sample collage creates an event that never happened; a mixture of time travel and seance. (...) [Sampling] it’s the musical art of ghost coordination and ghost arrangement.” (2011, pp. 313-314).

The role of enclosed time in sampling raises questions about the emotional content of contemporary sample-based music. Sampling popular music from the past touches on sound that is part of our collective sound memory; nostalgic material. The focus of this paper is on the process of reworking pop hits from the past calibrated to create feelings of nostalgia. Therefore the following chapter introduces the concept of nostalgia, the different dimensions in which nostalgia relates to the past and the role of nostalgia in relation to music.

### 3 NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia is a key element in the success of songs that interact with existing popular music and can evoke a broad spectrum of emotions.

“The word “nostalgia” comes from two Greek roots: νόστος, *nóstos* (“return home”) and ἄλγος, *álgos* (“longing”). [Russian-American artist and writer Boym defines nostalgia] as a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed.” (Boym, 2001, p. 1) On the other hand, nostalgia refers to our present, as Shaw and Chase (1989) argue: "Nostalgia is experienced when some elements of the present are felt to be defective and when there is no public sense of redeemability through a belief in progress." (p. 15)

The term "nostalgia" was originally coined in the late 17th century by a Swiss physician named Johannes Hofer to describe a medical condition. He believed it to be a disease caused by the "painful yearning" experienced by Swiss mercenaries serving far from their homeland (Anspach, 1934).

This early understanding of nostalgia as a medical condition has evolved into a broader sociocultural concept. In the 20th century, nostalgia began to be studied more from a cultural and psychological perspective (Adams, 2014).

According to Boym (2001), nostalgia often serves as a connector for the individual between its own cultural heritage, personal history, or can be experienced as a collective and publicly shared sense of community.

On the other hand Boym (2001) argues, it may also be used as a political instrument in the form of restorative nostalgia to demand the return to a former, supposedly better quality of life. Another form in which nostalgia can occur is in

a personal reflective way. Here the individual is aware of the inaccessibility of the past. This is due to the loss or transformation of the nostalgic space itself. This distance drives the individual to narrate the past in order to illustrate the relationship between past, present and future. (Boym, 2001)

Nostalgia can also be a form of received nostalgia. This can be experienced through marketing, by designing content that corresponds to the formal language of nostalgia specific to a generation, or by using the aesthetic features of nostalgic markers to create an imagined nostalgic realm.

This is a form of constructed nostalgia as Ballam-Cross (2021) describes it using the example of the music genres chillwave, synthwave, and vaporwave. "[These genres rely] on imagery and themes which evoke comforting nostalgic feelings or memories as a form of collective imaginative selfsoothing, ultimately generating a nostalgia for times and places that have perhaps existed only in the listener's imagination." (Ballam-Cross, 2021, p. 70)

To remain within the scope of this paper, music can serve as a carrier and trigger of nostalgic emotions. The fusion of music and nostalgia can be a form of autobiographical remembering and can contribute to the construction of social identity (Van Dijck, 2006). Davis (1979) suggests that nostalgia can be used to identify specific generations. However, Baer (2001) argues that it can also lead to creative bankruptcy or postmodern amnesia.

This paper will now observe the trend towards the use of nostalgia in music production, which has accumulated on the audio streaming service SoundCloud.

#### 4 NOSTALGIA ON SOUND CLOUD

This chapter explores blend and edit culture on SoundCloud, examining the platform's unique characteristics and its role as a hub for a music trend characterised by the use of sampling nostalgic music content.

SoundCloud is a German audio streaming and distribution platform founded in 2007 (SoundCloud Terms of Use, 2024). Unlike platforms such as Spotify, which predominantly focus on licensed content, SoundCloud operates as a User Generated Content (UGC) site, allowing users to share audio for free, and connect with other artists (SoundCloud Terms of Use, 2024). This also leads to

SoundCloud having a large music library of over 200 million songs while Spotify has a library of over 80 million songs (Kearns, 2023).

This distinction and especially the intuitive and free way to distribute music is crucial to the importance of SoundCloud as a hub for a more experimental and niche music community (Kearns, 2023).

SoundCloud played an important role in the emergence of new Artists and new Genres. Phillips (2021) argues that the emergence of highly innovative genres, such as SoundCloud Rap, was facilitated by SoundCloud. This movement has since influenced the rap charts, with artists like Lil Uzi Vert launching their careers on the platform (Boyce, 2022).

The preceding events establish an atmosphere on the platform that can offer experimental forms and pioneering work with an alternative form of publicity.

The trend of reworking nostalgic material is evident in various musical forms, which can be classified as either blends or edits.

Although these forms are similar, the difference between a blend and an edit is crucial. Both forms are created either as a result of a DJ set or in music production.

A blend, mashup or bootleg is a composition created by blending two or more pre-existing songs. A musical blend juxtaposes distinct tracks to evoke contrast and can be understood as an act of curatorial artistic practice. This process typically involves layering the vocal track of one song over the instrumental track of another, adjusting the tempo and key as necessary (Rojas, 2002).

An Edit or remix involves reinterpreting an existing song by altering its arrangement, instrumentation, or other elements, often with the permission of the original artist or copyright holder. It can be used to create a version of an existing song for a specific occasion such as in the form of a radio edit or a club edit.

These musical forms lower the technical requirements for music production. They can democratise music production and can be seen as an emancipatory practice that utilises mainstream media as a breeding ground, similar to the aspects of hip hop culture as described by Amir (2015) as “a culture of sampling” (p. 50).

Following the description of the blend and the edit form, this paper focuses on the significance of these music forms in relation to their use of nostalgic material. The trend utilises individual and collective nostalgia to construct social identity by reworking the musical body of the past two decades of popular music. As

described by Resident Advisor (2023), underground music is increasingly drawn to mainstream culture.

Contemporary music production that incorporates nostalgic musical material also has a progressive tendency, because it creates musical links between culturally disparate sonic elements, such as the artist DBN Gogo, who blends Benny Benassi's 2002 hit 'Satisfaction' with South African kwaito drums (Resident Advisor, 2023).

As this trend aims to explore unexpected musical connections, it exposes the listener to a wide range of drum rhythms (Resident Advisor, 2023). It is important to note that using a musical piece solely to arouse curiosity due to the recipient's unfamiliarity with the content can result in cultural exploitation and misrepresentation of the culture itself.

According to Albuquerque (2024), popular drum rhythms include Brazilian baile funk or funk mineiro, while Rose (2022) suggests jersey club, which emerged in New Jersey and was introduced to the mainstream by former SoundCloud artist Lil Uzi Vert with his hit "Just Wanna Rock". Furthermore, Resident Advisor (2023) notes that edits with jungle or drum and bass rhythms are currently trending. According to Jackson (n.d.), dembow rhythms and dancehall are popular. Komonibo (2023) notes the rise of South African amapiano, and Resident Advisor (2021) reports on the popularity of South African gqom, also known as kwaito drums.

#### 4.1 ELYSIA CRAMPTON CHUQUIMIA, SUNSET, GG12, ESTOC

This chapter presents the formal structure of compositions from the Blend and Edit culture. It uses four sound examples from SoundCloud to showcase sampling-based interaction with nostalgic content. In addition statements from artist estoc and Elysia Crampton Chuquimia who besides own musical productions work with nostalgic material, will illustrate the conceptual considerations that feed into their compositions.

Elysia Crampton Chuquimia - Kelela - final exam E DJ edit

The track Kelela - Final Exam E DJ Edit works with a slowed down and pitched instrumental version of Usher's 2010 track "DJ Got Us Fallin' In Love" extracting the songs main melodic elements a memorable sawtooth Dance Pop synth

progression. The vocal layer of Elysia's composition accompanies a vocal track by singer and songwriter Kelela. Additionally, the composition includes DJ-tags and sound effects as well as a wide four to the four drum pattern (Elysia Crampton Chuquimia, 2023).

#### sunsæt - LOVELETTER\_KARANGANHADA

This composition is a drum edit from a previously made edit called "Love Letter Written In Midi" by Imitation Therapy (2023) containing the vocal track of Lady Gaga - Paparazzi from the year 2009. In the drum edit the vocals of the commercial lady gaga Pop song merge with Brazilian Baile Funk drum elements (sunsæt, 2023).

#### GG12 - 48STROBES\_FUNK

The artist GG12 utilizes the Progressive House track Strobe by Deadmau5 and flips it into a Baile Funk track still containing the familiar melodic content of Deadmau5's radio hit from 2010. Furthermore, GG12 alters the rhythmic structure of the song 'Strobe' and uses distortion, to intensify the rhythmic fusion of Baile Funk and Strobe (GG12, 2023).

#### estoc - \*«*DeMON* \* *JUKeBOX* +dot+ *FLaC*»\*

The 17-minute mix begins with an acappella version of Avicii's 2013 track 'Wake Me Up', layering the opening bars of The Postal Service's 2003 track 'Such Great Heights'. This track was also sampled by dead pop star Lil Peep for one of his first releases, 2016's 'White Tee'. As a result, the sampled melody engaged with different audiences at different times, having multiple opportunities to make nostalgic connections with individuals. The mix also features Goa drums, followed by the vocals from LMFAO's "Party Rock Anthem" from 2011 over hardstyle drums, progressing to the vocals from Coldplay's "Yellow" from 2000 over jumpstyle drums, which transitions to drum elements from Jersey club. (estoc, 2023).

In an interview with Truants, the musician and DJ estoc describes the process of making blends as "collaging in that sense of taking two disparate things and

putting them together.(...) Finding those like little pieces of juxtaposition that come together” (Amin, 2020).

According to the artist Elysia Crampton Chuquimia, who produces instrumental music, nostalgically charged sample-based edits and DJ mixes, it is about creating musical spaces of possibility: as Crampton says, "what's great about music – it can generate and house multiple narratives." (Patzschke, 2018)

## 4.2 THISDJISXTREMELYNERVOUS

*ThisDjisXtremelyNervous* is the title of a personal artistic sound work which explores the possibilities of automated and randomised music production of nostalgic pop songs blends. The work consists of a massage chair for sitting, headphones, and a metal arm that positions a screen in front of the recipient’s face.

The work demonstrates the process of copying randomly selected mp3 audio files from a folder into an instance of the music software Ableton, using a computer user interface displayed on an iPad replacement screen. The audio files used in this work are a dataset consisting of all available acapella versions of the Top100 chart songs from 2000 to 2023. The computer interface operates through a fully automated workflow. While observing the workflow, the user listens to the musical output generated by the workflow in real-time. The musical foundation with which every accapella will be blended is an eight bar long guitar instrumental. Both the accapellas and the instrumental are standardised to the musical key of A major and have a tempo of 120 beats per minute. Through the constant blend of random pop accapellas with the instrumental, the workflow repeatedly triggers nostalgia.

The statement of the work is subtly conveyed through a feeling. A simple guitar loop combined with accapellas from 23 years of chart history may create a sufficient musical experience (Hartenstein, 2024).

## 5 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we explored sampling, hauntology and nostalgia to understand the different elements that feed into the sample-based music production that manifests itself in the Blend and Edit Culture on SoundCloud.

Sampling is more than a musical technique, but rather a cultural practice of emancipation, as Amir (2015) states: 'Hip hop is a culture of sampling'(p. 50). Samples are audible cultural artefacts from the past that are brought into conversation with contemporary sound during the process of samplebased music production.

There are different forms of nostalgia. Nostalgia can be experienced both individually and publicly/collectively, contributing to the construction of social identity and community. Received nostalgia is a form where markers for nostalgic feelings construct imagined or reconstructed nostalgic spaces by collaging in the formal language of nostalgic triggers. According to Van Dijck (2004), music is a powerful medium for evoking nostalgic emotions, and listening to popular music is closely linked to autobiographical remembering.

Furthermore, one of the fundamental questions is raised: How can Blend and Edit Culture be both progressive in its blending and editing, and retrospective in its reliance on nostalgic triggers from past hits?

As described by the artist estoc, it is about bringing different musical bodies into contact (Amin, 2020). Elysia Crampton Chuquimia describes that ,through her way of producing music, she enables the coexistence and communication of several narratives through one track (Patzschke, 2018).

In addition, *ThisDJisXtremelyNervous* explores automating music production, reducing the blend to its nostalgic qualities. Asking whether automated processes are sufficient to satisfy human emotions, and what role nostalgia as a musically accessible emotion plays in the emergence of new forms of musical expression.

In conclusion, the question arises on why this accumulation of blends and edits reworking nostalgic material is happening and what this development indicates.

Pelly (2022) argues that streaming services are curating our music consumption, leading to an increasingly passive experience. Additionally, Sijercic (2023) notes that our social media consumption is reducing our attention spans.

To combat this, music often employs nostalgia as a trigger to maintain competitiveness with other forms of media. Wiley (2023) notes that nostalgia is

effective in capturing and maintaining attention. Yang et al. (2022) argue that nostalgia activates different regions of the brain than when we encounter something for the first time.

Another aspect to consider is that social media and the internet have become important tools for acquiring audiences and for the consumption of music. This grants significant authoritative power to the providers of these platforms, which are non-governmental global companies like ByteDance, Meta and Google that structure their platforms to maximize economic profit.

Our music adapts to the needs of platforms like TikTok to compete in a battle for attention. In my opinion, the increased use of triggering elements in the production of our music can be attributed to this. The criteria for determining the profitability of art for artists is of great importance for the freedom and future of our cultural musical production.

According to Angus, nostalgia cycles are getting shorter and revivalist trends are peaking. Nostalgia is widely used as a marketing tool (Dazed, 2023).

This standardisation and commercialisation of our music can be traced back to the way in which our attention economies have been restructured by digitalisation (Citton, 2017).

The sociologist, philosopher, music theorist and composer Adorno wrote about the "regression of listening". Adorno argued that modern society tends to influence listening in a regressive way due to technological developments and the mass production of music. In particular, Adorno criticised the standardisation and commercialisation of music, which leads to people becoming passive and consumer-oriented instead of active and critical listeners.

According to Adorno's concept, this development follows the regression of listening, a regression of hearing in which people lose their ability to grasp and appreciate complex musical structures. Instead, they are attracted to simple, predictable melodies and rhythms that are easily digestible but often superficial and trivial. (Arte TRACKS, 2023).

On the other hand, as stated by writer, beatmaker and rapper Amir the technologies in which groups sampled or flipped the mainstream media, can be seen as an act of emancipation and evidenced by the success of hip hop culture as an innovative force in music history.

I believe similar to how a hip hop track can be an assemblage from elements of clarified or unresolved origins, artistic practice should be understood as a

collective process which manifests itself from the diverse influences and cultural heritage of the individual. The act of editing and recontextualising other people's work can be a form of curatorial artistic practice. This practise requires a respectful and culturally aware approach to the music of others, but will expand the field of musical expression.

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