2019

Oh, Maria

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PRIOR to this HCOM class I had absolutely no idea that CHAT was actually an acronym and did not just mean something you casually do when spending time with friends and although I am not very good at chatting with fellow companions, I found that the CHAT taught in this class was actually rather easy to get the hang of. CHAT stands for Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and it is basically analyzing different genres, not only in literature but in life, and understanding how the culture around it affects how the genre is used or portrayed. Then I was assigned this project where I would write about a genre that interested me and thought how it would be pretty intriguing to think about sampling as a genre and how it has enabled us to keep some culture from the past. But how is sampling a genre you may ask? Well technically (according to Kelly) everything is a genre, but in order to analyze just how sampling is a genre and how it works I will need to pick apart and explain the different components including Production, Representation, Distribution, Reception, Activity, Socialization, and Ecology. In Figure 1 below you are able to see an example of a "blog posting for the Earthwork site" with short definitions provided by Joyce R. Walker in her journal article titled, "Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: Because S*t is Complicated".

Well you may ask, what is sampling? And not only that but how has it preserved culture from the past? Well the official definition of sampling is, "the technique of digitally encoding music or sound and reusing it as part of a composition or recording" but in simpler terms it is simply the use of a sound from one song, modified to ones pleasing, and then to be used in a different song. The first sampling machine was created in the 70's and allowed people to record a voice sample and then use their voice in different tones on a keyboard but these machines were not easily accessible to the majority of the population as they were extremely expensive, but once they were more available to the general public we were able to create some incredible things. When thinking about what I should write about for this project I was dumbstruck as sampling is such a huge genre and I felt that I needed to be more selective with my topic. In the process I stumbled upon an interview with Wyclef (a hip hop guitarist) that mentioned that the riff from "Maria, Maria", a song by Santana, was actually sampled from the famous hook by Wu-Tang, "Wu-Tang clan ain't nuthing to f*** with", and it immediately struck my attention as I decided that I would focus my project on that sample and where it has gone throughout the years.

As you can see in Figure 2, the song "Maria, Maria" samples two different songs, one for the drums and one for the guitar riff throughout the song. This hit was very popular around the world mainly in America and Spanish speaking countries such as Puerto Rico. The name they are referring to, "'Maria' is the main character in the play West Side Story"(Songfacts) which was also a hit worldwide. We are then able to see that this song is sampled in 6 different songs with "Wild Thoughts" being its most current and most famous one. The part of the song that was first introduced to the community were the drums that were sampled from the song, "God Make Me Funky" by the Headhunters first released in 1975. At this time the Headhunters were a funk/jazz band and their music was recorded through instruments such as the saxophone, keyboard, drums, and guitar as they did not have the easy access to digital instruments as we do now. This type of music making was common at the time and was widely accepted for bands such as the Headhunters to perform live shows at different venues. Out of the seven studio albums they have recorded, this was one of the most popular being that this song was on so of course it was widespread to many different listeners of all different ages, mainly in the USA. During the mid 70's it was very welcomed to make music such as the music made by the Headhunters thus making it easier for audiences to listen without being judged.
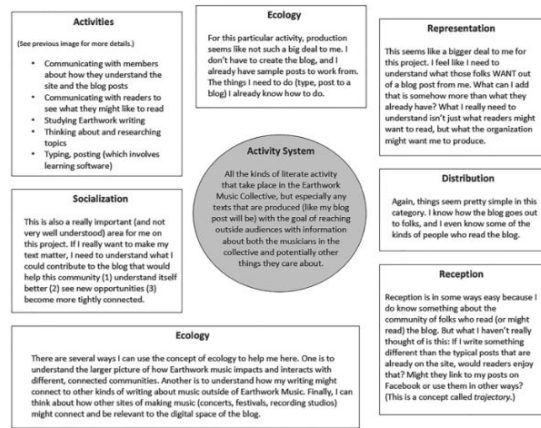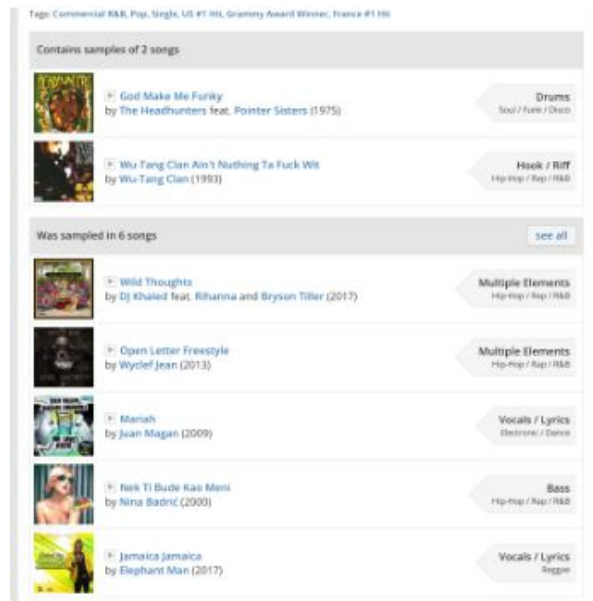

Figure 1: Joyce Walker's CHAT Map

Figure 2: List of Samples Involved with the song

This song was also sampled by the Fugees towards the 2000s then bringing a newer audience that focused more on hip hop. The other sample that was used in Santana's hit was the melody of the hook from "Wu-Tang Clan Ain't Nuthing Ta F*** Wit" and Santana used it to create the main guitar riff throughout the song. This genre of East-Coast hip hop was very popular in the early 90's and it the audience included a wide variety of listeners as it even had my own mother feeling like she was a gangster, in other words everyone was listening to Wu-Tang at the time. At this point in time the sampling machines used were similar to the ones used by producers today and the members of Wu-Tang were very accustomed to making beats and sampling with ease. This gem created by Wu-Tang has a handful of samples including the Theme from Underdog and the drums created by Biz Markie in the song, "Nobody Beats the Biz" therefore reaching an audience from the audience of the 1965 TV show and also hip hop fanatics from the 80's. As you can see there is a huge chain of distribution that goes into the song, "Maria, Maria" starting from a Kids show theme song all the way to a funk jazz band but this only gets extended when introducing songs that contain samples from the Santana hit. The first sample of this song was no more than a year later in the Croatian hit, "Nek Ti Bude Kao Meni" by Nina Badric and they used the bass that is played throughout all of "Maria, Maria". Although it was one of the least popular songs from the list, this style of Hip-Hop/RB was widely used all around the world at the time and allowed the location of listeners to extend all the way to people in

Figure 3: Clip from "Wild Thoughts" music video

Figure 4: Clip from "Maria, Maria" music video

Croatia, and bring the sounds to a different country. Following that song we get a vocal sample in Juan Magan's, "Mariah" giving us an electric/dance vibe that did not get much publicity but still definitely an honorable mention as it brought a different genre to listeners. The next sample we have is a song titled, "Jamaica Jamaica" by Elephant Man, very original right? It is basically a song admiring and singing about his hometown in Jamaica and of course attracted the audience from citizens in Jamaica. The next interesting sample we get is actually a freestyle from the man that helped make the song in the first place, Wyclef Jean with the "Open Letter Freestyle". This freestyle was very interesting to me because he used his own sample from nearly 15 years prior to talk about how much has changed in his home country of Haiti and uses this freestyle to get his message across that he wishes to improve what was the current state of Haiti. Let's just say his guitar skills are much better than his rapping skills, but it was a good message nonetheless and gained a lot of positivity for the country. Lastly, we have one of the biggest hits to come from this 2000's grammy award winner, "Wild Thoughts" by DJ Khaled featuring Rihanna and Bryson Tiller. This variation allowed the Santana hit to rise up the charts once again and allowed listeners of all ages to vibe together whether they enjoyed the spanish RB version or the newly renovated pop classic. One thing that was done very well in the DJ Khaled hit was that he did a great job of bringing back the same kind of visuals in this music video as the ones displayed in the original video back in 1999 (See figure 3 and 4).

Overall, you can see just how much culture is preserved and displayed through the art of sampling. We followed one song very roughly and went all around the world and travelled all the way back in time to the 60's, I can only imagine where a producer's collection of samples might take us. By using components such as Production, Representation, Distribution, Reception, Activity, Socialization, and Ecology I was able to explain the CHAT of sampling in "Maria, Maria" and show people are able to communicate through these different forms of music. I hope you are able to take in these pieces of culture and understand what the artist is really trying to pass on whenever you are listening to different pieces of music with sampling involved.

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