



Beyond Tradition: Technology, Music, and Cultural Transformation Book Review of Music and Technoculture

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Editors' Profile

René T. A. Lysloff is an Associate Professor of Music (Ethnomusicology) at the University of California, Riverside, with extensive research focused on traditional and contemporary arts in Central Java, particularly the Banyumasan region. His work centers on traditional arts such as *calung*, *gamelan*, and *wayang kulit*, and he is the co-editor of the book *Music and Technoculture*. He has published numerous articles, and his research involves interdisciplinary approaches to performance and culture. His research interests include the specific parts of the Banyumasan region, such as *calung*, *gamelan*, and *wayang kulit purwa gagrag* Banyumasan (Banyumasan-style *wayang kulit* shadow puppetry). He studies the intricate relationships between music, drama, and audience engagement in performances.

Leslie C. Gay Jr., Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee, holds a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from Columbia University. He has published articles and reviews on American music and culture in *Ethnomusicology*, *American Music*, and *World of Music*. His research also appears in *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader* (Routledge, 2005, edited by Jennifer C. Post). With his collaborator, René Lysloff, he conceptualized, co-edited, and contributed to *Music and Technoculture* (Wesleyan University Press, 2003), which examines the emerging and dynamic relationships among music, culture, and technology. Dr. Gay has published research on indie rock musicians in New York City and music publishing in 19th-century United States. Currently, he is completing a book on the reception of African American music in Denmark, with the working title, *Rhythmic Nation: African American Music and Danish Identity*. He began this continuing historical and ethnographic research with a Fulbright Scholar grant in 2002, during which he also served at the faculty of Aarhus University (Aarhus, Denmark). Leslie Gay is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Jazz Perspectives*. He remains active within the Society for Ethnomusicology, where he served on the Program Committee for the 55th Annual Meeting in Los Angeles (2010) and on the Waterman Prize Committee for the Popular Music Section (2008-2010). He currently serves at the SEM Audio/Visual Publications Committee and Advisory Council of the Southeast and Caribbean Chapter of the Society.

Book's Content

Music and Technoculture: Music as a Technocultural Social Space

The book “Music and Techno-culture” (2003), a collective work edited by René T. A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay Jr., is not only an academic publication, but also a monumental milestone that fundamentally reconfigures our understanding of music within the contemporary cultural landscape. This collection of essays boldly advocates for a crucial paradigm shift, moving away from ethnomusicological views and traditional music studies that tend to regard music solely as an isolated “cultural expression.” Instead, Lysloff and Gay Jr., together with their contributors, propose a new framework: music as an entity embedded within a technocultural context that includes the Internet.

The term “technocultural” is not merely a synonym for “technology in music.” It represents a dynamic and multifaceted social arena in which three fundamental elements—humans, technology, and social practices—are interconnected, mutually influential, and constantly shape one another. From the perspective of the editors and contributors of this book, technology can no longer be reduced to a passive role as a “tool” in the processes of creation, production, recording, or distribution of music. In contrast, in an era increasingly dominated by digital innovation and new media, technology is positioned as an active and influential cultural actor. The impact of this technology extends deep into the most intimate realms of human experiences. It significantly shapes our aesthetic experiences — how we listen to, feel, and absorb music. Technology affects sound quality, the ways we access and consume musical content (for example, from vinyl records to digital streaming), and creates new listening environments (such as through immersive personal headphones or virtual reality experiences). Furthermore, technology plays a role in modifying patterns of music consumption, creating new ecosystems driven by recommendation algorithms, sharing platforms, and online fan cultures. However, its influence does not end there. Lysloff and Gay Jr. emphasize that technology is also a force that participates in the construction of identity, both on individual and collective levels. Music genres associated with certain technologies, distinctive production styles, or even the digital platforms used to distribute music can serve as strong markers of identity, shaping how individuals identify themselves and the social groups they belong to. Therefore,

understanding music in the 21st century means understanding its inseparable presence within the complex network of interactions between humans and machines, which we collectively call technoculture.

New Paradigm: From Music as Artifact to Music as Technocultural Practice

In the introduction, Lysloff and Gay Jr. propose a conceptual framework in which technology must be understood as part of a complex cultural ecology. They reject the old dichotomy between “culture” and “technology,” arguing that the two are deeply intertwined within the everyday practices of human life. In this context, music serves as a primary vehicle for understanding how technology mediates the relationships between the body, sound, and meaning. This forms the core of the paradigm shift. Historically, music studies have often distinguished between “culture” (values, traditions, human expression) and “technology” (tools, machines, innovation). Lysloff and Gay Jr. argue that this separation is no longer relevant. Technology is no longer external to culture; rather, it has become deeply integrated into everyday practices. Smartphones are not merely communication tools but also music players, cameras, social media access points, and much more. Technology has become an intrinsic part of our lives, including the way we interact with music.

This rejection compels us to examine how technology shapes what we consider to be “culture” and vice versa. The music we create and listen to today cannot be separated from production software, streaming platforms, or even the algorithms that recommend it to us. Jonathan Sterne and Steven Feld expanded this framework by highlighting the political and economic dimensions of sound technology. In the context of media globalization, technology does not simply facilitate cultural exchange; it also reproduces certain power relations—who gets to speak, who is listened to, and who controls the medium of sound. Thus, technology is understood as a value-laden system imbued with ideology rather than a neutral entity. This line of thought asserts that technoculture is an analytical concept for understanding power, aesthetics and representation in the modern world.

Glocalization of Music: Identity, Mediation, and Resistance

The central section of the book, *Music and Technoculture*, fundamentally shifts the focus from abstract theory to the empirical realm through a series of carefully designed case studies. This section provides strong empirical evidence for the arguments presented in the introduction, highlighting how music is dynamically transformed in the complex encounters between global technological forces and the urgency of local identities. Through the brilliant contributions of scholars such as Tong Soon Lee, Deborah Wong, and Janet L. Sturman, readers are invited to realize that technocultural practices are not an exclusive phenomenon of Western civilization, but rather a living force that grows, develops, and adapts in various local and hybrid spaces around the world.

Lee, for example, examines how the call to prayer (*adzan*) in Singapore becomes a spiritual arena mediated by loudspeaker technology. This practice transforms the relationship between space, the body, and religious experience, demonstrating how technology becomes an integral aspect of religious expression. Wong discusses the Vietnamese diaspora in the United States, who use karaoke and music recordings as tools to maintain cultural identity amid alienation. Meanwhile, Sturman highlights vallenato in Colombia, which combines folk music traditions with recording technology to broaden its social reach without losing its local meaning. These three studies show that technology can become a space for negotiating identity; it can serve as a tool for resisting global homogenization while also acting as a bridge between tradition and modernity. Thus, technoculture in music is not merely a technical phenomenon but a social phenomenon that embodies the politics of representation and cultural sovereignty.

Body, Gender, and Technology: Music as a Performative Space

The following chapters, written by Charity Marsh and Melissa West, Marc Perlman, and Leslie C. Gay Jr. himself, explore the dimensions of the body and gender within technocultural music practices. In

their studies, the body is no longer seen as a passive biological entity but as a performative mediation that is actively engaged with technology. Marsh and West examine figures such as Madonna and Björk as artists who negotiate the boundaries between the natural and artificial bodies. Through the aesthetics of sound, costume, and production technology, these two artists create fluid identities, blurring the lines between feminine and masculine, organic and synthetic. Perlman highlights the activity of tweaking in audio practices, where users alter sounds through electronic devices. For Perlman, this activity creates a sensual relationship between the listener and the machine, opening new spaces for gender expression and subjectivity. Gay Jr. closes this section with reflections on instruments such as the Roland 303, which has become a symbol of the musician's body melding with the machine. In this context, music becomes an arena where technology is not merely an external tool but part of the body's extension that shapes the musical experience. This perspective leads readers to understand that technoculture produces post-human identities in which the boundaries between human and technology become increasingly fluid.

Another dimension raised in this book is the economy and politics of musical technology. Porcello highlights how technology has changed the way music is produced, distributed and consumed. Fikentscher discusses the history of the synthesizer as a technocultural artifact that has influenced new aesthetic forms. He sees DJs as technocultural figures who recontextualize electronic musical instruments as tools of artistic expression. Through practices such as sampling, remixing, and scratching, DJs are not only users of technology but also creators of new meanings that challenge the concept of originality in music. Sterne reviews music in public spaces such as malls and airports, where sound is used as a form of soft social control (soft power) and then closes this section with a theoretical reflection that music and media create an "aesthetic economy"—a system in which artistic value, capital, and ideology are closely intertwined. This chapter demonstrates that music technology shapes a complex ecosystem of culture and economy, where the relationships between producers, consumers, and mediums have become increasingly fluid and interdependent.

The epilogue of this book presents a challenge for the field of ethnomusicology to adapt to these digital realities. Lysloff and Gay Jr. emphasize that the study of music must now go beyond analyzing artifacts or traditions, moving toward an understanding of the social and technological networks that shape musical practice. Music is no longer positioned as an autonomous entity but as part of a media ecology—a relational system that connects technology, users, and socio-cultural contexts. Thus, *Music and Techno-culture* is not only a collection of case studies but also an academic manifesto calling for a paradigm shift: from music as cultural expression to music as an interactive technocultural practice. Here, technology is not merely a supporting tool but a subject of analysis equal to human beings.

Overall, this book constructs a progressive narrative from music as a cultural artifact to music as a social space shaped by technology. It positions technology as an agent that mediates sound, meaning, identity, and social relationships. In a broader context, *Music and Techno-culture* serve as a bridge between music studies, media studies, and cultural theory. This idea has far-reaching implications for contemporary art and culture. In artistic practice, for example, the concept of technoculture offers new insights into how artists interact with digital media to create innovative aesthetic forms. Meanwhile, in the context of popular culture, this book helps us understand how digital music, social media, and streaming platforms shape the way society listens, creates, and interacts.

Conclusion

Music and Technoculture marks a fundamental shift in the understanding of music in the digital era. This book proposes that technology is not merely a tool but a cultural agent that shapes practices, values, and identities. Through a synthesis of theory and case studies, Lysloff and Gay Jr. successfully demonstrate that technoculture is a field where humans and machines mutually shape one another, creating a new ecology for music, art, and social life. This book is not just about music but also about how people negotiate the changing times. It invites readers to see technology not as a threat to authenticity but as a

means for cultural and aesthetic evolution — a step toward a broader understanding of what it means to be human in an increasingly digitally connected world.

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