

Music and Technology: a Difficult Relation

By default, we (and google images as well) tend to associate technology with up-to-date/innovative machinery. Yet George Beauchamp's so-called *Frying Pan*, a 1931 forerunner of the electric guitar, was certainly "technological" back then, as the *Fortepiano* was in the 18th century, marking the transition from harpsichord to the modern pianoforte. These are just some of the numerous and little-known examples Dario Martinelli drew upon in his rigorous and thought-provoking talk in which he teased out the social implications of employing technology in music. Technology is not merely a support, he argued, but has profound consequences in the composition of music and in issues of artistic identity. Think of Queen, who made a point of not using synthesizers in their albums (until their eight album, *The Game*), thus promoting a self-image of "authenticity". In general, it is possible to identify four levels of the artists' identification with technology: exposed, like the electronic duo Matmos, often photographed with their equipment; clear, with the equipment visible but not thrown in one's face; unclear, where the technology is hardly visible in order to give an impression of untainted spontaneity, as in the production of *Imagine*, with which John Lennon intended to recover a pre-Beatles spirit; and *disguised*, where there is a specific intention to hide any technological strategy (or trick) employed, as in the case of hidden playback in supposedly-live performances. The debate following the talk was no less rich and lively, with issues concerning the theory of music and composition through artificial intelligence, the side-effects of the romantic myth of authenticity thwarting progress and experimentation, the correlation between innovation and success in the music of the 60s and 70s as opposed to the relegation of innovation to the underground scene in the last decades, and many more. We would have gone on talking for even longer, had not been already so late...

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