

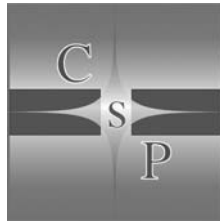
# Over the Edge: Pushing the Boundaries of Folklore and Ethnomusicology



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Edited by

Rhonda Dass, Anthony Guest-Scott,  
J. Meryl Krieger and Adam Zolkover



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## PREFACE

### PUSHING BOUNDARIES AND SHOOTING SPARKS

A dear friend and colleague in the Folklore Department of Indiana University lit the first flame for *Pushing Boundaries*. Matthew Kerchner and I met our first year on campus as teaching assistants for the large, introductory folklore course. Sharing a propensity to arrive early as well as our interest in folklore, Matthew and I discussed the diverse paths that had led us to folklore and our plans to create connections to other disciplines to increase our employment opportunities in the future. Our conversations began a spark that soon brought common threads and connecting fibers into view from our diverse backgrounds as well as our paths for the future. I quickly became addicted to these flickers of light, and like a junky, I wanted more.

Matthew and I knew that we were probably not alone in our view of our academic situations. Matthew proposed bringing together graduate students to explore further the threads hidden in the dim light of our isolation, and to create an event where our goals as graduate students could be discussed and explored. A conference would meet this need.

With Matthew's concurrent defection from the Folklore Department in 2004, it became pertinent that our idea for a graduate conference be implemented. I began making inquiries and arrangements in April of 2004 and where the summer months would usually bring a lessening of my workload, I found myself gearing up for more work than I had previously taken on. I enlisted the aid of Meryl Krieger and Anthony Guest-Scott, both ethnomusicology students in our department. As I felt the pull of academic boundaries pushing me and the conference more toward an ethnomusicological focus, I brought Adam Zolkover, a fellow folklorist, to our committee, evening the departmental representation.

The response to our call for papers was so heartwarming and overwhelming that we soon realized that our little one-day conference would need to be expanded before it even began. Each proposal offered a glimpse of new hues of light it would contribute to our project of illumination. Each challenged us as a committee to follow new threads of connection to organize the proposals into a logical pattern for all to see and understand the newly emerging perspective.



Through the process, we found that with each flickering flame the number of connections and possible combinations increased exponentially. While it presented our weary committee with a more challenging experience than we had at first expected, it also led us to a greater understanding of what we were undertaking. Throughout the organizational process, we came to a new view of the grand scheme of life, academia, scholarship and ourselves.

As Matthew and I had surmised, other graduate students were in search of an academic identity that they could call their own. As a committee, we strove to create a space where each scholar could claim a place for themselves and yet support the gathering light as a whole.

Pushing Boundaries: Extreme Folklore and Ethnomusicology Conference brought together over 40 scholars from across the United States and abroad for the inaugural gathering of graduate students from a number of disciplines interested in exploring and redefining the boundaries of folklore and ethnomusicology research. The conference began on a sad note, as our student community bid farewell to Alan Dundes who had passed away the week before our gathering. His work had shed bright beams of light into many of our lives and even with his passing; this light would live on in us.

Throughout the course of the two-day conference, each presenter challenged us present to look beyond our own perspectives of academic boundaries and illuminate the connecting fibers and common threads that bind our research more closely than we may have previously assumed. Light reflected from the core disciplines of folklore and ethnomusicology; their glow grew in depth as those in Music Education, Cultural Studies, and Religious Studies added their distinct but complementary tones to the show. As each paper unfolded and new threads were revealed, it became apparent that there was still more to be seen as new points of light were added. The enormity of what we were doing finally struck me during the second panel that I attended that morning. The excitement and enthusiasm of the participants was generating an emergent light that continued to build throughout that first day. Culminating with the keynote address by Dr. Gregory Barz from Vanderbilt University on his work in South Africa on the musical response to the AIDS epidemic, the day brought to light new connections even our committee had not glimpsed in the proposals.

Before the closing ceremonies, the general consensus was that the fire we built would live on and be rekindled and further stoked by a second conference the following year. The first weekend of April 2006 came alive with its own distinct glow over the second annual Pushing Boundaries Conference.

While the torch was passed to a new group of students to run the conference, we initial band of torchbearers began to push even further

organizing the conference proceedings into a volume through which we could expand the circle of light. Our greatest challenge came in exposing the connections we had seen in the grand glow of the performance setting of the conference for our imagined audience in a printed format. By narrowing the scope to the fourteen articles presented within this volume we were able to concentrate the light to elucidate some of the strongest fibers that were spun throughout the two day event.

Through out the work on this volume, the light of each participant is once again reflected and refracted giving us glimpses of the possibilities that wait just beyond our current exploration to be revealed as the light grows. Anthony, Adam, Meryl and myself have found ourselves again in the position as torchbearers. Through work begun with a casual conversation, we find that we are now equipped with our own flames we will take with us as we leave Bloomington. With it we will spread the glow as we pass the illumination it provided us on to future generations of graduate students. Perhaps through our efforts, they will see more clearly their place within the academic community and push the boundaries of light to new and ever expanding realms of possibility.

I would like to acknowledge a few of the many who have helped us in this endeavor.

- First and foremost, thank you Matthew Kerchner for the inspiration and encouragement to light the initial flame.
- The support staff of the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, Ruth Aten, Velma Carmichael, Jan Thoms, and Susan Henning-Harris; without your efforts of guidance and support our light would have become only a memory of a dream.
- To all the scholars who have come before us and to all of those who will follow, we thank you not only for your contributions that created a platform for our work, but for the opportunity to carve out our own space and the challenge to let others build upon it.

It is to all of you that we dedicate this volume.

Rhonda Dass

## INTRODUCTION

# OVER THE EDGE: PUSHING BOUNDARIES OF FOLKLORE AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGY, CLAIMING AND SHARING ACADEMIC SPACE

RHONDA DASS

The claiming of tradition as the unique concept that creates a cohesive and identifiable territory where folklore and ethnomusicology research is centered and legitimized within academic boundaries is itself a nod to academic tradition. This concept of tradition is considered by many the very foundation of folklore and ethnomusicology studies. Through the borders and boundaries of instructional and institutional focus, an academic identity is negotiated and endowed with the fiscal authority that lends an air of authenticity to a discipline of study. By way of combining this identity with institutional traditions in academia, a space is carved for the continuation of research in our closely related fields.

This claimed space within academic borders allows for financial support and political power within the bureaucracy of academia. It also creates a situation where the academic structure plays well into the basic constructs of the concept of tradition. As our changing world creates opportunities for new explorations, we as academics are called on to redefine how we divide the academic pie, building upon the past to support our work in the future.

The act of redefining and dividing the academic space anew reflects the dual nature of tradition. As we in academia are forced to examine new areas, the static side of tradition that carries our ideas through time and space must flex enough to include new spheres and ideas. Through the negotiation within the balance of stasis and innovation, tradition adapts to retain its useful position in the creation of identity for the institutions of academia as well as for those of us who work within them. It is often at the juncture of these negotiations where opportunities for pushing boundaries is not only presented but necessary to

retain academic viability for a previously bounded field lest it have its own space reallocated

The constructs of academia require that in order to legitimize a field of study, and therefore be able to compete for funding, boundaries and divisions must be set. As a graduate student who hopes to carve her own niche in the academic community, I, as others, am set the contradictory goals of finding a position for myself where I fit within academic boundaries and also present myself as unique within my field. These goals, when achieved, create a framework that would allow me to make significant contributions that will promote my area of study.

The benefits of interdisciplinary study are promoted within scholarly thinking but often are discouraged when budgetary considerations are discussed. This “push me – pull you” situation often impedes the budding scholar with a feeling of displacement and they can end up questioning themselves and their ability to reach either goal let alone both.

We form our sense of self by not only by what we are but also by what we are not. This life long process of negotiation in a quest to reconcile how we see ourselves with what others see in us, is not only at the heart of most of the papers presented at the Pushing Boundaries Conference, but also at the base of the struggles we face as graduate students. Through their search to achieve a sense of academic identity the authors in this volume have brought us new textures and ideas from their research to help us all in our creation and location of spaces we can claim as our own.

It would not only be arrogant, but also against the very concept of tradition to claim that we are creating something entirely new with this volume. As Adam Zolkover reiterates from his closing remarks at the first Pushing Boundaries Conference within his introduction to Section Two of this work, there is nothing new under the sun. Rather working within the traditions of academic scholarship, we are reformulating what we see and presenting it in what we hope is a previously unexplored perspective of connections and possibilities. Through our presentation of this view, we are asserting a new location for the academic identity negotiation that will challenge and reinforce our positioning within scholarly endeavors. The articles contained in these pages are themselves markers of identity produced within and created to define the academic culture.

Working from this base of academic tradition, the essays contained in this volume share grounding in the exploration of culturally produced markers of identity pulling from various academic disciplines. Through the examination of the performance of identity markers, each scholar develops and reveals connections that we may utilize in our ever-expanding perspective of scholarly subjects and approaches.

Common bonds unite the essays between sections as well as the more defined connections within each section. Working within the traditions of our academic areas, the following essays are grounded in the basic concepts of folk groups and ethnographic research methods that cross disciplinary boundaries. These common threads are not what were brought to light within the conference proceedings, but rather the focus of a new generation of scholarly research that places the emphasis not on the “things” of folklore and ethnomusicology, nor the performance aspect of the field as its predecessors in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*. This generation is pushing boundaries of the spaces that are the loci for the examination of the performance of cultural identities. Reaching beyond the borders of nationalism and academic communities, the contributors attempt to shed light on new locations of interest where the view may offer new insight and a reformulation that will become the basis for academic tradition in the future.

The settings of the following essays span the physical areas of bounded folk groups, interactions and exchange between distinct folk groups sharing space, diasporic and imagined communities. The thread of spaces can be traced through the works within musical research encompassed in the opening section.

Denise Dalphond begins our siting of our academic space within the sphere of electronic dance music. Exploring the historic construction of the genre, Dalphond argues for the space to locate Detroit techno music outside of the sphere of a postmodern discourse where contextualization and particularity may be employed in the analysis of the field.

Sharing the historic approach, Gabe Skoog brings a previously clouded area of Rock and Roll into vivid relief with his exploration of the globalizing threads that have previously been outside the realm of academia. Skoog pulls on the thread of global relationships to allow the areas of cultural production within the genre of Rock to redefine the commonly perceived borders.

Pulling inward from the global perspective, Rachel Conover lights up the variety of cultural expressions utilizing an apocalyptic connotation in the Extreme Metal sub-culture. While bounded within a specific folk group, Conover brings to the surface for discussion a previously overshadowed cultural use of historic symbolism that sheds light on the larger culture the subgroup sets itself in opposition to in addressing current social issues.

The essay by Sheaukang Hew looks at the relationship of the dominant American culture with ethnic communities on the issue of the cultural expressions of music and dance. Hew argues that the creation of ethnic identity is a choice that utilizes cultural expressions in the negotiation and legitimization of the individual identity. Unlike previous arguments based on the idea of “dime store ethnicity,” Hew locates her examination within the factors that influence how an individual comes to a particular choice.

How the ethnic minority influences the majority is also at the heart of the next essay by Gonca Girgin. Her assessment of the Roma musical community in Istanbul, Turkey takes the opposing perspective from Hew to look at how cultural expressions are brought into the majority. Her positioning as an outsider from her research community reflects the traditional approach within academia.

Speaking from within her claimed space of authority in the indigenous Hawaiian community, Aloha Keko'olani swings the spot light not only to the opposite side of the globe from Girgin, but also from the opposing perspective. With her assessment of tacit ideational expressions that illuminate her cultural worldview, Keko'olani not only shifts our view, but also bases her work in the academic tradition of a folklore genre.

Jiang Lu brings an insider perspective to the global issue of intellectual property in respect to Chinese folk art. Her positioning as an insider allows her to expand our understanding of how a culture adapts to an outside concept. Utilizing three examples to illustrate her ideas, Lu brings issues of patents, copyrights and cultural appropriation in China into a new light.

Pulling us across the world to better view for cultural understanding, Chantal Clarke brings a refreshingly new look at British monarchy and the importance it still holds for the English folk group. Tracing the idea of divine rulers beyond the legal standing of leadership allows rays of light to illuminate how our traditions may be stronger than our legislative precedence.

Daniel Peretti expands the academic location of folklore to look to the film industry in the production and dissemination of folktales. Through his analysis of the motifs presented to us through the cinematic medium, Peretti pushes the boundaries of folklore to a new positioning brought about by the development of technologies. Reminding us of the fluid nature of tradition, Peretti allows us to consider possibilities brought about by the shifts in our culture.

Jenn Horn not only gives us a new location in the presentation of folkloric information but also pushes the boundaries brought about by contemporary cultural changes. Her work forces us to consider how our cultural shifts in technology and family structures have changed our ideas of death and the treatment of the dead. Presenting her information in a narrative style makes us focus our gaze back within academia and the traditions surrounding scholarly presentations.

Paul Schauert shines his light in another direction within academia. His essay allows us to view the methodology of research within ethnomusicology and suggests consider an addition to the spectrum of accepted hues. Schauert argues that we consider a new location within the emotive realm as the new frontier in study and analysis. Similar to considerations when studying ideational folklore, emotive research may be complicated in the collection process, but more rewarding for analysis of cultural processes of expression.

While the study of the recording process and the influence recording technology has had on music is not a new area of study within the field of ethnomusicology, J. Meryl Krieger directs her lens at women and their distinct role in this area. In this paper Krieger examines how her role in the studio is affected by recording technology and the strategies employed in the mediation of her role in the studio that lends light to the metadiscourse produced through technological advances.

Pointing his lens at a different musical genre, Blaine Waide shines the spotlight at what he terms the “blues interview” allowing us to examine the academic traditions deployed in the negotiations between the researcher and those he interviews. The underside of Krieger’s work is illuminated as Waide exposes the negotiations brought to light by the racial constructs and issues of power attached to it within certain genres of music.

Sonya White takes us back to how we communicate within the academy through her work on ethno music educational techniques. On the opposing side of the spectrum from Horn, White presents new strategies for presentation of academic issues to those outside the circle of scholarly lights. Her introduction and play present a way of utilizing performance to obtain educational goals that has great potential within the fields of folklore and ethnomusicology and pushing boundaries to other ethnographic based disciplines.

The common thread of local and how we create our identity through our positioning is the outstand fiber binding these essays. Underlying connections throughout the works also bring to light the negotiations we undertake to better understand ourselves and through that understanding shed light on others. As the academic pendulum swings, we begin an era of inward focus, which might bring with it an examination of academia and the traditions we use in its identity negotiations.

From within the heavily trodden paths of tradition we begin to negotiate our academic identity and carve a nitch where our new perspective can gain authority and be legitimized. There may be nothing new under the sun, but perhaps through the unique combination of the common colors each author brings to this work, we can create a rare amalgamation that will shine on a new path for the future.





## **SECTION I:**

### **THE PENDULUM SWINGS ACROSS EDGES AND CORNERS**

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

ANTHONY GUEST SCOTT

Of power, Michel Foucault wrote, “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals.’ In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (1977:194). As with the term “power,” the term “boundary” can carry with it many of the same pejorative associations, but boundaries are also fundamentally productive. Not only do boundaries produce reality, organizing thoughts and experiences into meaning, but also they are special and intensely productive cultural loci—vortexes of heightened meaning manufacture where defining terms and concepts in the debate are arrayed in their most explicit housing. As such, we can say that boundaries, like power, produce people, and people thus become occupied with manipulating them *ad infinitum*. Even as we perceive these boundaries, however, we know they do not divide distinct and incompatible realms. We know they can be redrawn and rebuilt, and the fact that boundaries are always pushed, pulled, bent, broken, and relocated, in a state of perpetual motion, means that every part so divided is engaged in an endless dialogue with every other.

This section of the book brings together five essays that all, at varying stages in the musiculture research endeavor, seek out tucked-away pockets of human meaning. These explorations are also dialogues, however, intended to compare and illuminate how such pockets resonate with and against the larger formations with which they are inextricably connected. The pendulum swings across identity terrain from the individual to the collective, from minority to majority, from generic sub-levels to the surface, from ethnographic site to theoretical framework, and from the narrative margins of history to page center, and in doing so, casts a small light upon meaning at its edges and corners.

Music, as an expressive form, never comes packaged without a wrapper of identity. Some form of self-presentation is always involved, even if

that self is constituted as more than a purely unique entity—part of a long, but clearly articulated story of selves stretching back beyond recorded time. As people move through the world, they find themselves in contexts where new articulations of self become necessary to find a foothold that other people can recognize. The movement across great geographic distances, a physical terrain, is also movement across great stretches of social and psychological territory, and these travels continue for generations after the journey to shape selves. In a country like the United States that has come to be identified as a country of immigrants, a multicultural “melting pot,” multiple selves (and, specifically, multiple ethnic selves) are made available for selection and inclusion in the repertory. Ethnic selves become time-traveling vehicles enabling many Americans to reach back to a sense of community that they perceive as a fading pocket of meaning. Where is this selection happening; in what domains does it become manifest? One such dimension is sown together with the threads of musical acts—acts of belonging. Individual self and collective self are thus articulated against one another, the part and the whole, with neither color looking the same without its adjacent hue.

In this way, smaller collectivities can profoundly shape larger social formations. In these contexts, cultural influence is inverted through musical acts of belonging that are simultaneously acts of equalization. Power relationships between dominant and subordinate ethnic groups may consequently shift when refracted through the lens of music that, as a form of entertainment, is an intensively sought commodity. Through such channels, the musical performance of distinctive (but equally valuable) cultural and human identities becomes also a financial endeavor that can open up new doors of access to social and political rights for disadvantaged groups. A minority voice does not echo in an endless void; it is reflected from the walls erected around it by the majority. Nevertheless, those outside the walls can become fascinated with what lies within. Social barriers are broken down in such ways, and rebuilt in others.

Musical selves, and groups of selves, are not just ethnically constituted; they can also be carved out of the rock of generic forms. Layers of sub-genres blossom when people decide to cordon off generic terrain, and the construction of musical borders becomes a process of distinction. These borders may lie at an increasing distance from cultural centers, and deliberately so. Call them micromusics, subcultures, sub-genres, underground, alternative, or any of the host of terms that have arisen in academic and journalistic writing to describe such musical enclaves at the margins—identity formation and expression forge the anchor for this pendulum. We can locate the emergence of these generic collectivities through the examination of a whole host of expressive dimensions. Symbolic representations like clothing, body adornment, the artwork on band T-

shirts and music videos, textual analyses of song lyrics, etc., thus become the compositional elements in alternative narratives of reality at the edge of a broader cultural “center,” a normality which is ignorant of the more important values cloaked in its shadows.

The power of the center is always an interlocutor with the formation of the periphery. This dialogue does not only form the superheated core at the center of the musiculture dynamic, boundary and meaning production, but also extends to analyses of such phenomena. The intellectual life of ideas arcs according to a pendulum-like motion of its own, swinging toward and away from the center of popular use. In the process, often different kinds of ideas become bundled together, growing into a conceptual morass that seems to take on a power of its own. The consequence of this accelerated conceptual inflation is that these murky analytic tools get used in places where they explain very little beyond continuing to justify the importance and power of the megatheory. In the process, certain expressive forms become banners and poster-children for megatheories even as they are practiced in social sites and in historical trajectories that defy such analyses.

Finally, historical narratives of musical genres, compiled from the bones of periodization, comprise our last pendulum. Again moving from the center to the outer edge of the pendulum’s swing casts a light upon the forgotten people and music that played their parts before growing dim, grayed-out, and finally extricated from the picture. Thus, the task of revisionist history is to go back and cast some light upon these souls, broadening the scope of the narrative (and problematizing the linear course of narrative itself as a valid form of historical representation). When this narrative scope is expanded to the level of the global, it can and must account for global processes of musical importation, appropriation, and expression, processes that have been a part of human existence for millennia as people traverse boundaries of geography, identity, expression, thought, and time.

People try to make sense of their world by articulating all of these boundaries against and in alignment with one another, and, consequently the lines (and spaces) change: geographies become selves, selves become genres, theories become histories, and histories become geographies. These essays swing across all of these alignments, revealing their musical motivation.

## References

- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

## CHAPTER TWO

# TECHNO ... ISN'T THAT GERMAN?: POSTMODERNISM AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ORIGINS OF ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC

DENISE DALPHOND

In academic research on American popular music, postmodern approaches to cultural and musical analysis have proven widely acceptable. Scholars highlight pastiche, recycling, borrowing, and multiplicity as characteristic of popular music, thus calling for postmodernism as a way to analytically access and account for these supposedly unique processes of making music and culture. During the 1990s, scholarship on African American and American popular music set the default on postmodernism, and rigorous research and analysis were exchanged for indiscriminate applications of a popular theory to any musical example that appeared to be referencing other discrete musical examples or texts.

I argue that the multitude of conceptual characteristics said to fall under the rubric of postmodernism fails to fit cleanly under this rubric when the complex histories of these ideas are explored beyond their theoretical boundaries. In this essay, I explore more nuanced understandings and recognitions of history in relation to studies of African American music and American popular music and postmodern theory. I focus specifically on techno music, a sub-genre of electronic dance music, exploring the African American historical foundations of techno and proposing analytical points of departure that do not automatically opt for postmodernist approaches to Black popular music.

Alternatively, I suggest examining techno in terms of textual and discursive interaction. This approach enables an examination of the ways in which musical texts in electronic dance music performance are bounded and repeatable, as well as what qualities provide musical texts with their capacity for involvement in processes of intertextuality, recontextualization, and interdiscursivity. The multitude of sonic and performative dimensions in electronic dance music is immense and staggering. A performance of electronic dance music consisting

of one DJ, two turntables, a basic mixer that allows the levels of bass and treble to be adjusted and allows the DJ to “cross fade” between the two turntables, and a few crates of records can be aesthetically pleasing and commercially successful in terms of paid admission into a live performance as well as purchase of a recording. However, there are other types of equipment used to manipulate the pre-recorded sound on the records played on turntables, as well as equipment that enables a musician to electronically produce a composition performed live using electronic equipment. Performance of electronic dance music is a complex process with many layers of textual involvement and circulation.

Before I begin a detailed discussion of postmodern literature and analysis of Detroit techno, I will foreground some reasons why postmodern approaches may not suit techno, nor much of African American and American popular music in general. First, postmodernism has been defined and used by many scholars as a meta-theory (encompassing an expansive collection of theoretical concepts and analytical approaches) as well as a theory in its own right. Scholars also interpret postmodernism as a historical framework, identifying it as a particular stretch of time during the mid-to-late-twentieth century. In much of the writing in which scholars apply postmodern analysis to popular music, and to popular culture in general, the writer devotes a great deal of space to describing the cultural expression under examination and why it fits under some vague notion of a postmodern rubric. However, very few words are actually dedicated to the arduous task of defining the author’s particular interpretations of postmodernism. What we are left with is a frustrating conflation of historical periodization, theoretical framework for understanding cultural expression and social action, and collection of various theoretical ideas.

This entanglement of referential frames becomes crystallized into a grand narrative of pastiche, rupture, and deconstruction, a grand narrative that would, at least at the level of metatheory, seem to defy the fundamental relativistic tenets of postmodern theory. There is a sort of internally inconsistent logic operating here that is particularly evident when scholars raise up American popular music in general, but particularly hip hop and electronic dance music as postmodern mascots—paradigms through which postmodern ideas and analyses come shining through. This is commonly the case because many approach the music with postmodernism ready-made to fit around the subject matter, an approach that begins at the top and works its way down to the subject of analysis.

Much postmodern scholarship applies the theory to American popular music in just such a general, universal way, making rigorous definitions and qualifications seem unnecessary. Scholars write about postmodernism assuming that it exists somehow in an amorphous discursive entity beyond the confines of

a printed publication, and that this discursive knowledge is universally recognized, understood, and accepted. In addition, postmodern analyses of music often disregard history in exchange for exciting ideas about recycling and pastiche. I argue that particularity and contextualization are fundamental to any cultural analysis. With this in mind, it becomes nearly impossible to engage with a topic of research using a top-down approach. A responsibility to the particular social and historical contexts of Detroit techno, for example, stresses the importance of developing an appropriate theoretical approach that suits research findings.

Techno music does not fit into the postmodern formula in which a performance, cultural expression, or social action is measured for its use of pastiche and disjuncture, and catalogued as postmodern. This conception of culture assumes that DJs do not engage in any form of sophisticated cultural referencing, rather, they haphazardly mix in any sound nearby into their “recycled” performances. There is a great deal more complexity to conceptions of continuity in relation to history and culture in the context of techno. Applying an intertextual analysis to Detroit techno recognizes this continuity because it emphasizes the constellation of texts and the connectivity between these texts and the people who create, recreate, and manipulate them.

## **Narratives of Origin**

Techno, along with house, jungle, drum n’ bass, hard house, down-tempo, trance, big beats, and garage are all forms of music created electronically by DJs at turntables and/or other electronic equipment (such as drum machines, multi-track mixers, computers, and samplers) and are parts of a larger genre that music theorist Mark Butler calls electronic dance music (Butler 2003:6). According to Butler, this term was established by fans and musicians and is popularly accepted. Describing the production of electronic dance music, Butler explains that “the most distinctive characteristic...is its utilization of electronic technologies such as synthesizers, drum machines, sequencers, and samplers” (2003:6). Electronic dance music is most commonly performed by a live DJ in a dance environment. The musicians performing this music often perform impressively varied collections of musical references to African American forms of music such as rhythm and blues, disco, and hip hop, as well as many other types of musical samples.

Techno is perceived by many musicians as well as the popular print and visual media as having its origins in European rave culture. To the contrary, the history of techno has its beginnings in African American parties and dance clubs in Detroit in the late 1970s. Moving outward from Detroit, this music and its creators became popular in Europe at rave parties in the late-1980s while slowly

losing community support in Detroit. During the 1990s, techno returned to the United States and became associated with rave parties attended by white teenagers and young adults and the productions of European and American white DJs. Despite techno's locally specific beginnings (Detroit), this music became broadly known as electronic dance music and associated with European popular traditions. Techno is popularly and academically considered to be a sub-genre of electronic dance music and grew out of a complex of musical and cultural influences during the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to many DJs and popular and scholarly writing on electronic dance music, the narrative of origins for electronic dance music is constructed around African American, urban, gay, male club cultures in Chicago and Detroit during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

As ethnomusicologist Kai Fikentscher describes, techno also had strong initial connections to New York City's disco culture and its later Underground Dance Music culture. Fikentscher explains that Bronx-bred DJ Frankie Knuckles took residence at a Chicago dance club called the Warehouse in 1977, forging a link between Chicago and New York. Knuckles had spent many years DJing in New York dance clubs in the late 1970s with "his friend and mentor Larry Levan [renowned New York DJ], who had declined an offer to relocate there from Paradise Garage in New York" (Fikentscher 2005:467). The links between Chicago and Detroit were also powerful and mutually influential. Many DJs creating techno in Detroit in the early 1980s tell stories of traveling to Chicago for the weekend to hear important house DJs. They would then return to Detroit and try to emulate what they heard as well as adopt those Chicago sounds to a Detroit techno sound. According to independent techno historian Beverly May, "Detroit techno pioneer Derrick May describes how powerfully these Chicago road trips impacted the young Detroit artists during their formative years: 'If you wanted to hear Ron Hardy or if you wanted to hear Frankie Knuckles play, it was like Juice, so much juice. Frankie was on the Fridays and Ronnie was on the Saturdays, so we just made a weekend out of it'" (May 2006:335).

In her detailed history of Detroit techno, May describes the complex of musical influences from which techno emerged. She states: "The musical roots of techno lie in several divergent traditions: experimental electronic music, 1980s electro-pop, German 'kraut-rock,' and, most importantly, the African American heritage of electro-funk, disco, and house" (May 2006:331). Other influences include music inspired by Detroit radio, European electronic music like that of Kraftwerk, American electronic music of the 1960s and 1970s such as Phillip Glass, and Chicago house, (techno's precursor by about seven years). Many techno DJs from Detroit claim other references like "James Brown and



Sly Stone, Afrika Bambaataa, George Clinton, Robert Moog, the Paradise Garage, Frankie Knuckles, and the Warehouse” (Glazer 2003:66).

Detroit’s early techno music makers were mostly African American men and came from suburban, middle-class, college educated backgrounds. Three men—Juan Atkins, Derrick May, and Kevin Saunderson—are often referred to as the “Belleville Three” or the “Holy Trinity” of techno and are credited with the creation of techno music in Detroit. Kevin Saunderson recounts to pop culture journalist Simon Reynolds, “In Belleville, ... it was pretty racial still at that time, there wasn’t a lot of black people there. So we three [Juan Atkins, Derrick May, and Saunderson] kind of gelled right away” (Reynolds 1998:14). In an interview between Reynolds and Derrick May, another of the Belleville Three, May explains,

For us, it was always a dedication.... We used to sit back and philosophize on what these people thought about when they made their music, and how they felt the next phase of the music would go. And you know, half the shit we thought about the artist never even fucking thought about!... Because Belleville was a rural town, we perceived the music differently than you would if you encountered it in dance clubs. We’d sit back with the lights off and listen to records by Bootsy and Yellow Magic Orchestra. We never just took it as entertainment, we took it as a serious philosophy. (1998:15)

Reynolds goes on in his book *Generation Ecstasy* to discuss the African American middle class teenagers infatuated with European popular culture in Detroit during the late 1970s. He claims, “The Belleville Three belonged to a new generation of Detroit-area black youth who grew up accustomed to affluence, thanks in part to the racially integrated United Auto Workers union” (1998:15). African American teenagers of this cultural and economic background in Detroit established high school social clubs who would rent out spaces to hold dance parties. In these clubs, the teenagers preferred Italian disco, electro-funk from New York, Euro-synthpop, and American New Wave. These “Europhile tastes” of Detroit’s African American, middle class youth were influenced by radio DJ Charles Johnson, “the Electrifyin’ Mojo,” “whose show, ‘The Midnight Funk Association’ aired every night on WGPR through the late seventies and early eighties. Alongside synth-driven funk by Prince, Mojo would play Kraftwerk’s ‘Tour De France’ and other Euro electro-pop. Every night, Mojo would do his Mothership spiel, encouraging listeners to flash their headlights or bedroom lamp so that the intergalactic craft would know where to touch down” (Reynolds 1998:16).

## Postmodernism and Popular Music Studies

The historical time period in which techno emerged as well as the ways in which techno music was created made the music ripe for scholars to group it with other contemporary popular music forms being labeled postmodern. Like techno, many popular musical forms surfacing during this period with generally related musical characteristics are often joined together under the label postmodern. Postmodernism is often applied as a limiting label to cultural expressions as a way of emphasizing a dramatic rupture with the past and with modernity. Hip Hop, electronic dance music, and much American popular music in general are all said to be postmodern forms of musical expression. The application of the label 'postmodern' to these popular music forms highlights particular musical and communicative characteristics, specifically the manipulation of equipment, as well as the eclectic use of cultural referencing in the music. When analyzing electronic dance music and hip hop, scholars locate the postmodern in the music through the element of sampling in its use of rupture and pastiche, recreation and reinterpretation, claiming it as the practical, sonic manifestation of postmodern theory. It is interesting to note that most of these scholars who claim postmodernism for electronic dance music have not conducted ethnographic research in order to confirm such suspicions. Many scholars apply postmodern theory as a definitive answer constructed primarily from academic discourse.

Historical periodization presents another level for analysis of popular musical expression to which postmodernism is often applied. John Storey emphasizes the central problem with this relationship when he explains that, "Perhaps the best way to think of the relationship between pop music and postmodernism is historically. In most accounts, the moment of postmodernism begins in the late 1950s – the same period as the emergence of pop music. Therefore, in terms of periodization, pop music and postmodernism are more or less simultaneous" (Storey 2001:153). Storey, like many scholars of postmodernism and music, assumes that postmodernism is a social and philosophical foundation of late twentieth century, "advanced capitalist democracies of the West" (2001:147). He further states, "whether postmodernism is seen as a new historical moment, a new sensibility or a new cultural style, popular culture is cited as a terrain on which these changes can be most readily found" (2001:147).<sup>1</sup> Constructing a postmodern analysis of popular music around a conception of history as a universal, unilateral, linear progression of time for "advanced capitalist democracies of the West" is a dubious project. Means of cultural communication labeled postmodern by many scholars might be more accurately recognized as consistently recurring elements

and styles of cultural communication for many people, in many places, at many times in local and global histories of human social existence.

Using pastiche as a common point of analysis of popular music, many scholars branch their analysis out to include globalization in this discussion. Cultural studies scholar Tony Mitchell focuses a great deal of his writings on the effects of globalization on popular music, as well as the effects of popular music on globalization. In *Popular Music and Local Identity*, he recognizes the autonomy and power of the cultures into which American popular music has been imported and claims that culturally specific interpretations of this music outside the United States are localized versions, which incorporate native, or local cultural references into the music. He locates this discussion within the theoretical concept of postmodernism. Mitchell relies upon a predictable intellectual narrative commonly used by scholars of Hip Hop music and popular culture in general: the “fragmentation and breakdown of ‘master narratives’ in popular music led both to a widespread tendency towards pastiches and recyclings of earlier forms and idioms of popular music, and to an exploration of Third World musics” (Mitchell 1996: 3). Ultimately, Mitchell provides evidence for challenges to this postmodern narrative, but remains loyal to the unifying concept of postmodernism in his analysis of popular culture as a global phenomenon.

### **Postmodernism, Historicity, and Techno**

Mitchell’s version of the postmodern critique is inadequate in application to contemporary African American and American popular music. This approach operates without any historical discussion of Black musical forms that preceded Hip Hop and techno, and that preceded the postmodern era. Any prior developments or expressions in Black music and culture are almost irrelevant to the postmodern theorizing of contemporary Black popular music. History does play a role, however, as scholars categorize time in terms of two distinct eras known as modernity and postmodernity, as in the work of John Storey. Not all scholars adhere to this approach, but for Mitchell, the music-making practices he references are interpreted as having begun at the time modernity came to an end. This is generally assumed to be around 1960. This is hardly the case for African American musical expressions of any genre. As musicologist Guthrie Ramsey explains, “African Americans have continually (re)articulated, questioned, abandoned, played with, and reinforced their ethnic identities through vernacular musical practices and many other activities. ...The process of repetition and revision that characterize these musical styles shows how black musicians and audiences have continually established a unified and dynamic ‘present’ through music” (Ramsey 2003:36).

In this statement, as well as throughout his book, Ramsey recognizes historical and social contextualization as paramount in his analysis of what he calls “race music.” Ramsey presents important ideas challenging postmodern constructions of history and cultural communication. He expands the discussion of African American cultural processes beyond the confines of postmodernism, prioritizing contextual contingency over postmodern constructions of time and place. He is concerned with identifying and exploring “some of the ways in which meaning is achieved in various styles of African American music,” and a principal point of inquiry for Ramsey is “How does the music under consideration work as discourses and signifying practices at specific historical moments?” (2003:3).

A general recognition of difference and multiplicity of voices, identities, experiences, and, at a basic level of communication, texts, is an important concept in the analysis of Detroit techno. However, it is in the application of postmodernism to specific cultural action that problems arise. Mitchell’s construction of popular music as postmodern assumes that the acts of appropriating, recycling, mutating, and recombining “earlier and contemporaneous genres and sub-genres” are unique to the contemporary popular culture beginning in the late 1980s and limited mostly to North America and Western Europe. Paul Gilroy, however, a central figure in the study of the history and culture of the African diaspora, has claimed that these postmodern practices are not new, but rather are fundamental characteristics of Black culture in general. Mitchell references Gilroy’s concept of a “changing same,” as developed by Amiri Baraka, to describe his interpretation of “[t]he disintegration of ‘master narratives’ in popular music” as containing “the seeds of regeneration” (Mitchell 1996:16). Explaining his position more clearly than Mitchell’s interpretation, Gilroy states, “Today, this involves the difficult task of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions that suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilizing flux of the postcontemporary world” (Gilroy 1991:126).

Gilroy explains that Black popular music should be recognized as part of an “Atlantic diaspora,” or diasporic continuum, “in which the use of historical musical forms through sampling and re-appropriation is not parody or pastiche but a reconstruction of black histories, folding back on themselves time and again to celebrate and validate the simple, unassailable fact of their survival” (Gilroy 1993:5).

Gilroy is expressing the notion that Black popular music is not postmodern in its approach to music making through cultural referencing. He explains that Black music of the postmodern period, historically speaking, reaches far back

into the age of modernity, and relies on performance practices and music-making practices that can be traced in modified ways back through the history of the music of African Americans and continuing back to cultural expressions of women and men in West Africa before slavery had become the foundations for the world's economy and social systems. Thus, the inception of techno during the particular historical moment labeled "postmodern" does not automatically establish it as such. Categorizing Black music in this way is reductive and does not allow for any recognition of history, or of African and African American conceptual approaches to music-making that are fundamental to contemporary popular genres.

As Paul Gilroy and Guthrie Ramsey have clearly established, concepts like cultural recycling, pastiche, re-creation, and reinterpretation of past utterances are historically imbedded in African American culture in general as well as in many other cultural and geographic contexts. These cultural recycling practices have long been recognized by many scholars as essential to African American expression and life. Sharing and borrowing were vital when enslaved women, men, and children were forced to migrate to the Americas; families and ethnic groups were separated, and people who shared language and other cultural practices and expressions were forced to live in isolation. In order to survive and thrive in such a hostile "New World," Africans, and soon after, African Americans, needed to communicate with others in similar situations of enslavement. The Negro folk spiritual, and its concert hall adaptation—the arranged spiritual, minstrel songs, ragtime, jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, rock n' roll, soul, funk, disco, hip hop, house, techno, neo-soul, and the list goes on: sharing of musical, cultural, social, ideological, historical, and communicative characteristics is commonplace in these musical genres and is a prominent quality of much of African American and American popular musics.

Historian and American studies scholar Tricia Rose explains the problems with labeling rap and hip hop as postmodern. She claims that this approach tends to ignore the "contradictory stance toward capitalism, raging sexism, and other 'non progressive elements' that have always been part and parcel of jazz, the blues, and R&B, as well as any number of other nonblack cultural forms" (Rose 1994:24). She further explains that linking Hip Hop and rap with postmodernism disregards the historical social and cultural developments that led to the creation of Hip Hop and generated dramatic change over the past three decades of the genre's life. Privileging a different reading of history, Rose is clearly conceiving of profoundly greater degrees of change as well as continuity over time and space.

Richard Shusterman rationalizes the application of postmodernism to popular musics like rap and Hip Hop. He explains, "By considering rap in the context of postmodern aesthetics, I hope not only to provide academic

aestheticians with a better understanding of this much maligned but little studied genre of popular art. I also hope to enhance our understanding of postmodernism through the concrete analysis of one of its unique cultural forms” (Shusterman 1991:614). His analysis is thus an attempt to elevate the intellectual status of rap music towards something that can be legitimately researched and analyzed in academic settings. He lists a number of “themes and stylistic features” that are characteristics of postmodernism, such as recycling, eclecticism, embracing new technology and mass culture, challenging notions of artistic autonomy and purity, “and an emphasis on the local and temporal rather than the putatively universal and eternal” (1991:614). He then explores aesthetic and practical features of rap music, framing each discussion within one of these postmodern themes, such as “Cutting [or Sampling] and Temporality” (1991:618).

Shusterman explains postmodern interpretations of history through the writings of Fredric Jameson. Advocating historicity, Jameson (and Shusterman) problematizes conceptions of “real history [as] the one true account of a fully determinate past whose structure, context, and meaning are fixed and unreviseable” (Shusterman 1991:624). Shusterman asks, “Does not the postmodern and post-structuralist decentering critique of definitive, ontologically grounded boundaries put the whole notion of being ‘fully outside’ seriously into question?” (1991:628). However, these sentiments could possibly be accredited to many different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives, including post-structuralism as a broad category that does not necessarily include postmodernism, and current anthropologically-based deconstructivist interrogations of truths and universals that became pervasive throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s.

Some popular music scholars engage postmodern ideas in their analyses of various sub-genres of electronic dance music. Techno, house, and drum n’ bass are a few of the particular sub-genres that have been treated in this way. British ethnomusicologist Tony Langlois characterized house music in the UK as having “culturally postmodern elements” in a 1992 article titled “DJs and House Music Culture in the UK.” In this important (but all too brief) article about the British history of house music, Langlois discusses the aesthetics of the genre through an exploration of the artistry of the DJ in performance. He explains, “DJs create original music as ‘bricoleurs,’ using a wide range of sound material, some not obviously ‘musical,’ in an organized, expressive way. Their use of records as sources for ‘recomposition in performance’ may be novel, but the process of improvising with available sounds and musical structures is not” (Langlois 1992:235).

In a more explicit segment aligning his approach with postmodernism, Langlois states, “The culturally postmodern elements which are found in