21M.380 · Music and Technology
Recording Techniques & Audio Production

Written assignment 2 (wr2)
Music technology in 50 years

Due: Monday, November 28, 2016, 9:30am
Submit to: Mit Learning Modules ▸ Assignments
7% of total grade

> […] We have also sound houses, where we practice
> and demonstrate all sounds and their generation. We
> have harmonies which you have not, of quarter sounds
> and lesser slides of sounds. Divers instruments of mu-
> sic likewise to you unknown, some sweeter than any
> you have; together with bells and rings that are dainty
> and sweet. […] We represent small sounds as great
> and deep; likewise divers trembling and warblings of
> sounds, which in their original are entire. […] We rep-
> resent and imitate all articulate sounds and letters, and
> the voices of beasts and birds. We have certain helps
> which set to the ear to do further the hearing greatly.
> […] We have also divers strange and artificial echoes,
> reflecting the voice many times, and as if it were tossing
> it; and some that give back the voice louder than it came,
> some shriller and some deeper; yea, some rendering the
> voice, differing in the letters or articulate sound from
> that they receive. We have also means to convey sounds
> in tubes and pipes, in strange lines and distances […]
> (Bacon 1627)

1   Instructions

Francis Bacon's vision of music technology is now close to 400 years
old. Use his words as a starting point for a critical essay, in which
you reflect on what music technology might sound and look like
50 years from now (but not later).

2   Guidelines

- Unlike Bacon, who formulated a general vision, I would like you
  to describe a single imaginary music technology device (will we

even speak of 'devices' then?) in detail.

- Describe the society which has created and uses this device and the underlying motivations for its constructions and use.

- Do not merely describe 'any' future – really try to assume the specified 50-year timeframe. It is your grandchildren who will be using the technology you describe.

2.1 Points to address

- Which cultural developments have accompanied the technological developments that you are describing, and how are they visible in society?

- Which other fields from science or art might have unexpectedly contributed to the newly available technologies?

- Which technical problems that we are facing in music technology today will we have overcome?

- Will we have overcome any *aesthetic* challenges that our creative spirits may currently be restricted by? Will we have experienced any aesthetic or cultural *losses* that coincide with the development of these technologies?[1]

- Which new technological and aesthetic challenges will we be confronting?

3 Assessment criteria

Your essay will be assessed in terms of its imagination (in how much detail can you describe that fictional piece of audio 'gear'?) and the critical sociocultural perspective that it demonstrates (how plausible and detailed is your description of the society that has yielded that device?). Try not to limit yourself to either, bright technofuturism or cultural pessimism.

4 Submission format

Please submit a single file named `essay.pdf` (2000 words max.).

[1] Günther Rabl (2008, my translation) argues that "[e]very technological progress is necessarily accompanied by an initial aesthetic step backwards." What does he mean by that, and how might this be relevant with regards to audio production?

References & useful resources

Bacon, Francis (1627). *The New Atlantis*. URL: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2434 (visited on 09/16/2017).

Rabl, Günther (2008). "Veraltete Methoden." In: *Betrachtungen*.

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