




# Electroacoustic Music and the Digital Future

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The relation of music and technology is increasingly paradoxical. Within musical thought, digital technology allows the composer to conceive musical ideas from strikingly new perspectives. At the same time technology allows music to be increasingly imbedded within the **media environment** as a commodity with more exchange value than use value. Music frequently functions as a surrogate environment that interposes itself between us and the external world, imposing the relationship we have to an environment (e.g., making us feel "happy") instead of expressing our relationship to that environment. Music as an expression of the human spirit is locked in a struggle with music as the product of corporate control.




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In such a situation, it is far from clear what the role of creative musical education should be today: training for the marketplace or sandbagging the crumbling foundations of the museum of past accomplishments against the wavewash of the corporate agenda.

In the 20th century, the electrical, then electronic and now digital technology



mouthpieces for commerce or the state. It can be sound that we have chosen to listen to, even if we subsequently relegate it to the background of our attention, or sound that has been chosen for us, with or without our permission. It can be broadcast, narrow-cast, copied, purchased, consumed, digitized, packaged, archived and catalogued. Despite its amorphous and volatile character, I will characterize this complex web of communication practices as the electroacoustic community.

Electroacoustic technology is striking in its ability to treat sound as a commodity as audio products package the listening experience in economic terms. The control over the production and distribution of such commodities defines what is accessible to the consumer. Despite the potential for infinite variety, commodity culture actually restricts variety to a number of semi-identical products that compete for

marketshare. It is not surprising to find fewer than half a dozen formats on any

the process which the use of commercial hardware and software equipment is

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progress would result in an increased value of sound as commodity. An analytical

style of listening had to be developed whereby the quality of sound could be separated from the sound itself (keep in mind that all acoustic sound has the same degree of quality) with progressively finer distinctions being made until some ears became "golden" like the taste buds of a connoisseur of fine wines.

The same process of consumer education continues today with digital technology, with many similar beliefs and degrees of technical knowledge being incul-

mainstream commercial production, perhaps less lavish than the commercial ver-

duction (the DAW) and distribution (self-produced CD's and the Internet) change the  
marginalized situation of the electroacoustic composer? As useful and impressive as

Digital artists (much like the public in general) have to be clever in their negotiation of such a volatile landscape. Many will admit, perhaps sheepishly, that they

