

# Alter Audio Treatment

Paula Gardner

The Alter Audio project contains a variety of digital musical experiences that allow users to engage creatively in sound and music composition in both urban and mountain environments. Users can engage in composition over time and in live musical collaboration.

In the composition scenario, users can experience any or all of the following three phases: Audio Sampling\Resampling\Effects (manipulation), Audio Choreography (mixing) and Repositing audio samples (containing/sharing). Sounds, which are collected from caches, created by users or mixed (or remixed), are intended to reflect, in some way, the environment in which they are obtained, created or remixed.

Sounds are available to users from multiple sites: from data caches located in specific environmental spaces, from personal computers, or directly from other users when in proximity. Data caches will be located in various places on Mount Royal (Montreal) and in various urban locations in Montreal, and perhaps in other locations (such as Banff or other cities). Users are provided a map of cache sites, while sensors (on cell phones or wearable, designed garments) will inform users of the exact GPS-locatable position of data caches, and alert them when in range. Users could then reinterpret the sounds by manipulating them, via cell phone (as an in-phone edit) or via computer (where editing can be more complex). Finally, the sound compositions can be stored in Repositories, which are physical on-site hard drive containers or on-line, virtual sites.

The audio project can be used by individuals working alone or collaboratively, and can be used by individuals in multiple locations, on-line, in Montreal with cell phones, and in transit. The components outlined above allow individuals to engage in audio composition over time or in “live” collaborations, individually or in teams. The live music composition option allows users to interact, in real-time, with individuals in the urban or mountain setting, or both; in this scenario, users would turn on and off short, matching audio samples in different combinations to create the sense of composition or progression. The samples would already be tuned to the same key and rhythm, making a wrong combination impossible. In the live scenario experience, users would be alerted to the proximity of other users by sensors; proximity would be required to allow the collaboration to continue; and volume would increase as users moved closer together in the environmental space.

The project creates interesting theoretical, methodological, and technological questions. First, the Alter Audio project inquires into how different people see different meaning and environmental relevance in different types of sounds—music, ambient, effects, etc. The project tests how different individuals will combine sounds in response to the technical organization of the project, in response to working as individuals vs. as members of a collaborative team, and in projects that are live versus over time. The projects, by virtue of their three components, can compare users’ interests in sample-

creation, choreography and repositioning their composition as an open source, malleable project.

Technically, the project tests out the viability and usefulness (in terms of user desire, creative productivity, etc) of using audio stored in data caches, via upload and via live collaboration (in person via cell phone, and via computer). The project allows individuals to access a final composition that has been repositioned (by an individual or group) and to then remix or even substantially alter that audio piece, raising the question of users desire to interact with open source, repositioned audio compositions in a public space.

Finally, the project, in offering possibilities for creating mobile music, tests out the viability of peer to peer, and wireless networks, online-communities, and sensor interfaces in urban and mountain audio experiences, and tests out user desire for creative interaction, sharing, and participatory design (in terms of making audio files and completed audio pieces available to future users.)